

ROD SERLING'S THE TWILIGHT ZONE MAGAZINE

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April 1982

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COLLECTOR'S EDITION: FIRST ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

Rod Serling's

APRIL 1982/\$2

THE TWILIGHT ZONE

NEW JOURNEYS OF THE IMAGINATION
AND ALWAYS THE UNEXPECTED

Magazine

ASTONISHING NEW FICTION

by Joan Aiken
Harlan Ellison
Ramsey Campbell

Full-Color Preview:
Paul Schrader directs
NASTASSIA KINSKI
in 'Cat People'

William Hope Hodgson's
HORROR CLASSIC
'The Voice in the Night'

Special!
THE PRIZEWINNING STORIES
from Twilight Zone's
Short Story Contest

Complete ...
For the First Time:
**ROD SERLING'S
LAST INTERVIEW**

plus
'The Thing from the Slush'
by George Alec Effinger

Photo Feature:
TZ CAST PARTY

Gahan Wilson
on films
Robert Sheckley
on books





Publisher's Letter

A good many writers make the mistake of enclosing a stamped, self-addressed envelope, big enough for the manuscript to come back in. This is too much of a temptation to the editor.

—Ring Lardner

The above is *not* true ... at least not in the *Twilight Zone*. Our first short story contest is over, and the winning stories are here for you to read. Many were sent back—more than nine thousand, by our last count—but we *did* read each and every one of them, and I wish that we could have answered all of you personally. I lived with a writer most of my adult life, so I understand that writing is like giving birth. There is the joy of creation, but there's also—sometimes—the agony of rejection. We know that we're dealing with your "heart, gut, and soul."

Writing is a lonely business, a delight and a torture. As Rod once said, it's "the most grueling, ulcer-laden, and most satisfying enterprise known to man." Those of you who remember our first issue of the magazine last April know that Rod got his start while still in college, when he won a writing contest. I hope we've given just such a start to W. G. Norris, Dan Simmons, and Joseph Bocchi. My own personal congratulations to them. And honorable mention to David Shifren, Jim Cort, E. R. Stewart, Robert Bender, Paul Sammon, A. W. Carter, Nina Downey, Cezarija Abartis, Fred Kempner, Michael Beres, and other runners-up. I hope they will glow for a while in their triumph, and that they'll go on to long and successful writing careers. I'm sure the victors will feel that the real importance of winning was the fact that someone has finally said, "Hey, your work is good. We'll buy it!"

For those of you who didn't win, the good news is that we have another short story contest running right now. *The Twilight Zone* offers fertile ground for imaginative speculation, and this time I'd like to see some strong speculative fiction. Some time ago, in *Future Shock*, Alvin Toffler noted that this kind of writing has immense value as a mind-stretching force, since it "leads us through an imaginative exploration of the jungle of political, social, psychological, and technical issues" that will confront us in the coming decades. He goes on to point out that this should be "required reading for Future 1."

So, a few ideas to get you started. How about the following?

The head of our Energy Department has declared that Three Mile Island *proves* that nuclear power is safe.

The Assistant Secretary of Education says that people today "don't know what to think themselves. They want to be told what to think by those of us here close to the front."

The Secretary of the Interior is suggesting that the use of the deadly poison Compound 1083 be resumed.

Or a few items from yesterday's paper:

"We may be gearing up for the next major 'Jobs' program for America's unemployed—a guerrilla war waged on the coffee plantations of El Salvador."

"Young people will stand a better chance of avoiding cancer after a nuclear attack if all those over forty will do the jobs that present the most radiation danger."

Or, if all this is too heavy, how about the Japanese invention of a substance that turns male carp into great lovers (presumably works on humans, too) ... or the report from Nairobi that tells of the "discovery" of a viable, renewable, available energy source: the animal ... or the seals up north that are being painted blue to save their lives?

That's it. Please get to work. I'd really like to publish some of that "required reading" next time around.

Carol Serling

Carol Serling

THE TWILIGHT ZONE MAGAZINE

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One year older . . .

...and more than nine thousand manuscripts later, we're pleased to present the winners of our *Twilight Zone* writing contest: three very special stories—with two of them tied for first place.

This unexpected situation arose because, during the selection process, our five sagacious judges—**ROBERT BLOCH**, **HARLAN ELLISON**, **RICHARD MATHESON**, **PETER STRAUB**, and **CAROL SERLING**—were allowed to divide their votes. As a result, we're awarding two \$1000 first prizes this year: an auspicious beginning for what's destined to become an annual event.

One such prize went to **W. G. NORRIS** for his story *I'll Be Seeing You*, in which a bereaved widower finds a doorway to the past in a most unlikely place. It's one of the strangest time-travel tales we've ever read—and one of the most moving. Norris himself is a traveler of a different sort, having spent much of his life in government service overseas after a wartime stint in the Navy. A native of Boston, where his story is set, he's studied at Bates and the University of Hamburg, has lived in Geneva, Paris, Washington, and (for five years) Nigeria, and speaks six foreign languages including Persian, Arabic, Hausa, and Fulani. Today he teaches African, Asian, and European cultural studies—as well as coaching football and baseball, two solidly American pastimes—at a high school in Suffolk County, Long Island.

Our other first-prize winner, **DAN SIMMONS**, is in a similar line of work; for the past eleven years he's been teaching in an elementary



Bloch



Ellison



Matheson



Straub



Serling

THE JUDGES

school—sixth grade, at present—near his home outside Denver. Though he wrote fiction while attending Indiana's Wabash College and Washington University in St. Louis, he started again only two years ago. This has obviously been a very good season for him: in addition to winning our contest, he's made a subsequent fiction sale to *Omni* and has recently become a father—which should make that \$1000 all the handier. As to his prizewinning tale *The River Styx Runs Upstream*, in which humanity's denial of death is carried to tragic, often terrifying extremes, Simmons sees a certain influence from Peter Straub, whose *Ghost Story* he admires for its cool restraint and its awareness of the genre's literary origins. He notes, though, that *Styx's* opening lines (and they are haunting ones) are based on something more universal: on a fantasy that will be familiar to anybody who's ever suffered the loss of a loved one.

The death of loved ones is, in

fact, the theme that links these two stories. In each, a character refuses to accept that death and finds, in fantasy, a remedy for his grief—albeit one which ultimately fails. Death also triumphs in our third-place story, *The Seed*, by **JOSEPH BOCCHI**; but if you read carefully (as this subtle, rather difficult story deserves to be read), you'll discover that life is, in the end, victorious. Though the story seems as purely Southern Gothic as an undiscovered Flannery O'Connor, Bocchi himself is an upstate New Yorker; a graduate of the State University at Oneonta, he lives in a rural community outside Albany and works as a staff writer for *The Saratogian*, a daily newspaper in Saratoga Springs. Like Dan Simmons, he has been writing fiction for only the past two years, experimenting with various voices and styles. Of his success in our contest, he says: "It enforces my belief in the unbelievable."

The response to TZ's story contest was enormous, astonishing, and, at times—when the accumulated mail threatened to crowd us out of the office—downright dismaying. As the accompanying photographs may suggest, the sheer volume of submissions should comfort those writers—often very talented writers—whose entries were passed over. To all such disappointed contestants, I offer this reminder: you have plenty of company. The odds against winning were three thousand to one.

Photos like these explain why writers sometimes grow discouraged: there are so many like-minded souls out there, all struggling for the



Two week's worth of contest entries



The managing editor copes with the weekend's mail



Norris



Simmons



Bocchi

THE WINNERS

recognition they know they deserve. Such photos also explain why slush-pile readers occasionally have nightmares of drowning in an endless pool of onionskin, paper clips, and manila envelopes. In fact, drowning's the least of it; a friend of mine, the artist Jason Eckhardt, once drew a cartoon in which an editor named Klein is about to be devoured by a (literally) monstrous pile of manuscripts, and a luckless reader named Courane faces an even more blood-curdling fate in **GEORGE ALEC EFFINGER's** *The Thing from the Slush*. Effinger himself has read through many a slush pile in his day; fortunately for us, that day is long past, and he's now able to devote himself to producing some of the fantasy field's most whimsically imaginative fiction.

Effinger had a story in our magazine only two issues ago, but



Aiken



Effinger



Campbell



Ashley



Breville

Slush proved so irresistible that it seemed a shame to make you wait for it. Two other writers, both of whom were in our premiere issue one year ago, are making their third TZ appearance: **HARLAN ELLISON** with a modern-day Arabian Nights tale played for laughs, and **RAMSEY CAMPBELL** with a saga of dread and inexorable doom set in his native Liverpool.

Appearing in *Twilight Zone* for the first time is **JOAN AIKEN**, best known here and abroad as a writer of such celebrated children's adventures as *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase* and *Nightbirds on Nantucket*, as well as collections of supernatural fantasy such as the recent *A Touch of Chill: Tales for Sleepless Nights* (Delacorte).

Daughter of the American writer Conrad Aiken, she was born in Sussex, England, and now divides her time between there and New York. Like her father, whose classic "Silent Snow, Secret Snow" was adapted for Rod Serling's *Night Gallery* (and narrated by Orson Welles), Joan Aiken's "Marmalade Wine" became one of the most horrifying *Night Gallery* episodes of all, starring Rudy Vallee and Robert Morse.

LINDA BREVILLE, who conducted Rod Serling's last major interview, did so originally for *Writer's Yearbook*, though the piece appears here for the first time in its unedited form. A Los Angeles-based writer and actress, she's worked for Paramount, CBS, and 20th Century-Fox, has managed two comedy groups for stage and cable tv, and has built up a personal collection of over 500 scripts and 1500 feature films and tv shows (including 130 *Twilight Zone* episodes).

MIKE ASHLEY's most recent piece for us was a profile of writer J. Sheridan LeFanu in our January



What Jason drew

issue—an issue which, for reasons still not explained, seems to have been bundled off to the printer without benefit of proofreading. Our regular proofreader, Kathy Murray, didn't see the issue till it appeared on the newsstands, and, on leafing through it, immediately spotted more than two dozen hair-raising errors. (A reference of mine to "a message from beyond the grave" had been transformed into something far more provocative, "a *massage* from beyond the grave.") Hardest hit was the LeFanu profile, the entire middle section of which was lost in a jumble of transposed lines and columns. Mike took it all philosophically when I phoned him in England to give him the bad news. "You know, it's rather odd," he said. "Nothing of mine has ever come out the way I wrote it."

Ah, well, maybe so. This time around we're featuring Mike's profile of William Hope Hodgson. I'm keeping my fingers crossed.

—TK



Manuscripts held
for second reading

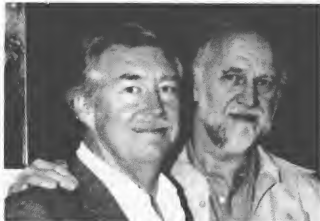
A Reunion in the Twilight Zone

You are invited to enter ... the Twilight Zone," read the invitations, and more than eighty-five people attended. The scene was the Los Angeles home of TZ contributor Marc Scott Zicree, who was celebrating completion of his book *The Making of 'The Twilight Zone'* (due this fall from Bantam). His party brought together many of the hundred people he'd interviewed in the course of his research. In addition to the food and conversation, guests were treated to more than six hours of *Twilight Zone* videotapes, including episodes starring Nehemiah Persoff and John Anderson, both of whom were in attendance.

For those who had worked on *The Twilight Zone*, it was a happy reunion with friends not seen in many years. For those who weren't there, we offer this gallery of guests.



Among the prominent guests were actors Nehemiah Persoff ("Judgment Night") and John Anderson ("A Passage for Trumpet," "The Odyssey of Flight 33," "Of Late I Think of Cliffordville," and "The Old Man in the Cave").



Writers John Tomerlin ("Number 12 Looks Just Like You") and Richard Matheson ("The Invaders," "Nightmare at 20,000 Feet," etc.) had a chance to reminisce.



Director Alvin Ganzer ("The Hitch-Hiker," "The Mighty Casey," etc.) chats with actor Charles Aldman ("And When the Sky Was Opened," "Little Girl Lost").



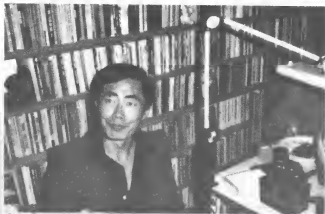
Mr. and Mrs. Jerry Sohl. He was the co-author, with Charles Beaumont, of "The New Exhibit," "Living Doll," and "Queen of the Nile."



Actor Murray Matheson, who played the caustic clown in "Five Characters in Search of an Exit."



Producer Lillian Gallo, a one-time *Twilight Zone* production assistant, poses with director Douglas Heyes ("The After Hours," "The Eye of the Beholder," "The Invaders," etc.).



Star Trek's George Takei (star of the rarely seen TZ episode "The Encounter") will be returning as Mr. Sulu in the upcoming *Star Trek II*.



Actor Liam Sullivan talks with Lillian Gallo. In "The Silence," he played a man so determined not to talk that he had his larynx removed.



Carol Serling and Marc Scott Zicree display the piece de resistance, a cosmic-blue *Twilight Zone* cake.

Books

by Robert Sheckley

If for nothing else, World War II will be remembered for its important contributions to the entertainment industry. No other war in recent times has proven so fruitful. The Korean "police action" is pale by comparison; Chinese and Koreans just don't project. Vietnam was a triumph for ambiguity and moral uncertainty, neither of which is box office unless you're Strindberg. Only World War II had Nazis, people who were just plain downright evil without redeeming qualities. Only crazy people could sympathize with the Nazis. They didn't want sympathy. They wanted to spread terror throughout the world and keep people in line. In theatrical terms, being unbelievably evil is heavy typecasting, and perhaps only the Germans could have gotten away with it. Hitler could be looked upon as a gifted director of gothic theater, the man who put the German zeitgeist onto the world stage. He had the strongest dramatic impulse in a European ruler since Napoleon. His style was Wagnerian, and he was addicted to the grand gesture. How he loved sending those panzers across Europe! Although he failed at everything else, he did succeed in exercising a decisive stylistic influence on his time... to give the devil his due.

The Keep, by F. Paul Wilson (William Morrow, \$12.95), begins in 1941, when the Third Reich was triumphant all over Europe. The Wehrmacht had not yet invaded Russia, and the outcome of the war was still in doubt. In fact, things were looking pretty good for Hitler.

The story begins at German headquarters in conquered Poland. Erich Kaempfer, a major in the SS, is dispatched to an important command in Rumania, where he is to build and run an extermination camp at Ploesti. It's really a splendid opportunity to advance his career, but there's a job he must do first on the way. Trouble has been reported at the Dinu Pass, in a remote and isolated part of Rumania. The German commander there has signaled that something is killing his men, and he wants permission to relocate. But this is unthinkable, and Kaempfer is sent to straighten things out. Kaempfer takes two



squads of soldiers and proceeds to **The Keep**, as the structure guarding the pass is called.

And so begins a complex and compelling story of evil, both natural and supernatural. Wilson has created two imaginary worlds, that of 1941 Rumania and the occult environment of the killer. It's a good tale with plenty of suspense and thrills. My only complaint is with the human side of the book. The characters are typical rather than individual, and suffer a loss in believability. I kept on feeling that this well-constructed novel should have come alive for me more than it did. Mr. Wilson is an interesting writer. I enjoyed *The Keep* and look forward to Wilson's next book.

Masques, by Bill Pronzini (Arbor House, \$12.50), takes an old pulp situation and makes something fresh and contemporary out of it. The scene is New Orleans. It's Mardi Gras time, and there's a heady sense of cliché in the air, inviting the unwary writer to overstatement. There are voodoo drums, decapitated chickens, beautiful Creole ladies, spooky old beah men, gloomy graveyards, jazz on Bourbon Street, the Old Absinthe House, the French Quarter, Kid Ory, Papa Legba... No doubt about it, Mardi Gras in New Orleans is a compendium of familiar literary elements just waiting to be abused. Pronzini has done a good job of injecting life into these stock tableaux.

One of the things he has going for him is a believable protagonist. Steve Giroux could be any of us. His marriage has collapsed messily, but he has this hotel reservation for Mardi Gras, the money is not refundable, and so, what the hell, he goes. There he is in New Orleans, a refugee from the matrimonial wars, drifting in that peculiar vacuum of loneliness that is reserved for America's singles. (There is a different vacuum of loneliness reserved for America's marrieds.) Giroux is still in shock from the breakup, passive and needy, and Juleen, whom he meets in a bar, is attractive and a bit kooky. He goes home with her, and so begins a Mardi Gras nightmare, a masque of terror played against all the other masques of the celebrant city.

It's a neat story. Giroux finds himself in a terrible situation, mystery follows mystery, complications abound, and you wonder how Pronzini is going to tie it all together. He does, very satisfyingly, and the revelation at the end of the book is unexpected and effective. There's really a double ending, one the solution to the mysteries Giroux has been going through, the other a direct outcome of Giroux's helpless and passive character. The second ending is even scarier and more true to life than the first. I can only hint at it so as not to give it away.

Since *Masques* deals with such melodramatic stuff, I can forgive Pronzini for a leaning toward portentous prose. It's the curse of the picturesque—attempting to write about it invites self-parody. But since we've allowed Poe his 'tintinnabulation of the bells, I guess we can let Pronzini have his *boudoum boudoum* of the voodoo drums. —RS

John Stanley's **Creature Features Movie Guide** (softcover, \$8.95; Box 687, Pacifica, CA 94044) failed my initial test: the first film I looked up was the sleazy late-night perennial *Beast of Blood*, which it described as "sequel to *Mad Doctor of Blood Island*"—a film that, under its own listing, was described as "sequel to *Beast of Blood*."

Despite such paradoxes,

Stanley's book makes for compulsive reading. It contains nearly three thousand highly opinionated capsule reviews of movies ranging from 2001 ("a landmark") to *Son of Godzilla* ("does have a special inept charm"), from *The Seventh Seal* ("bawdy, brutal, funny, and touching") to *The Gore Gore Girls* ("a movie you want to miss miss").

Stanley casts a wide net, even covering films as obscure as *The Brute Man* (a 1946 Rondo Hatton vehicle) and *Zamba the Gorilla* (which starred John Hall and a pre-teen Beau Bridges). However, the book is disappointingly short on facts; unlike Leonard Maltin's indispensable *TV Movies* (NAL, \$3.95), it lists relatively few actors (often just a single star), seldom names directors, and makes no mention of running times. Where Stanley lists only two names from the cast of *King Kong*, for example, Maltin offers seven, and even gets in a mention of Max Steiner's music. Stanley describes *Boccaccio '70* as "three sex-oriented tales by leading European directors," but neglects to tell us who they are; Maltin finds room to list Fellini, Visconti, and De Sica. The only cast member Stanley supplies for Roman Polanski's *The Fearless Vampire Killers* is Sharon Tate, who had a minor role; he fails to mention that the film starred Jack MacGowan and Polanski himself.

What his book is long on is opinion. As the host of a San Francisco tv station's Saturday-night horror show, Stanley tends to be a little straitlaced—he's outraged by Wes Craven's *The Hills Have Eyes* ("pandering, wretched . . . utterly sickening and beyond redemption") and denounces David Cronenberg's *The Brood* (a film many have found austere and rather intellectual) as "disgusting . . . about as entertaining as stock footage taken at Buchenwald"—but most of his views seem eminently sane (i.e. agree with my own): he loves *Séance on a Wet Afternoon*, *The Thief of Bagdad* in the Korda version, *Let's Scare Jessica to Death*, and *House of Wax*, gives short shrift to *The Shining*, *Diabolique*, and Roger Moore's James Bond, calls *Logan's Run* "thoroughly botched," and dismisses *The Black Hole* as "a

mess." He somehow fails to appreciate such classics as *Monster on the Campus* ("primitive") and *The Hideous Sun Demon* ("demonstrative of how bad some films of the 1950's could be"), and he hails Disney's inept *Bedknobs and Broomsticks*—in which objects flew by means of all-too-visible wires—as "masterful," but I suppose everyone's entitled to a few blind spots.



Less excusable is his penchant for sophomoric puns at the expense of movies he dislikes. On *Die, Monster, Die*: "Die, movie, die." On a European *Faust*: "Sell your soul to the devil to avoid seeing this." On *Fangs of the Living Dead*, starring Anita Ekberg: "Fangs for the mamarries, Anita." Often he strains so hard to be witty that he becomes downright unintelligible—a Poe film elicits "To be avoided like the Red Death; tell-tale signs of no heart"—and he occasionally descends to the level of a kindergartner. On *The Johnstown Monster*, about a Loch Ness-type creature, we get: "Call it Ness Mess." On *Macumba Love*: "Macumba, Dumba, Dumba." Dumba indeed!

It is mandatory, in reviews of this nature, to *tsk-tsk* at all the "regrettable errors" one has spotted in the text, thereby implying that one could have produced a far better book than the one under review, had one been so inclined. Ridiculous as that idea may be, I'm not about to abandon a perfectly good tradition, and so feel honor-bound to point out that Stanley (or his proofreader) gives us "Sogourney Weaver" for Sigourney, "Roy Scheider" for Scheider, "Sandro Milo" for Sandra, "'Crasy' Corrigan" for "Crash" Corrigan (whoops!), "James Hill" for Arthur Hill, and "Norman Roeg" for

director Nicolas Roeg. It also misidentifies Peter Jeffrey as "the cruel headmaster" in *If* (which is hardly the case) and *Bedazzled*'s Peter Cook and Dudley Moore as "members of the satirical review The Establishment" (they were, of course, in "Beyond the Fringe").

However, the book is graced with some delightfully inventive alphabet headings by Kenn Davis and a wise and candid preface by Fritz Leiber, which bears quoting:

Other movies may appeal to our adventurousness, the romantic (or slushhead) in us, the lover, the student of life and history (or scandalmonger), the doting parent (children can be so cute), the analyst of character and society, even (who knows?) the idealist and do-gooder. But the horror film appeals to our imagination and our cowardice. We know that if we ever encountered the monster in real life, we'd run like hell—we certainly wouldn't go blundering into the haunted house, the dark woods, the thick underbrush, or the empty school building with its echoing halls. But we're perfectly happy to sit back and watch a pretty girl do those stupid things and be scared to death so long as we're safe in our theater seat or on our living room couch. Maybe this explains the guilty, apologetic fellowship felt by devotees of weird terror . . .

The book also provides its share of startling facts. Did you know (I certainly didn't) that Andre de Toth, director of the 3-D *House of Wax*, had sight in only one eye, or that, due to budget problems, the giant octopus in *It Came from Beneath the Sea* had only six tentacles? Did you know that Basil Rathbone's last film was *The Ghost in the Invisible Bikini*? That the director of *The Conqueror Worm* died at twenty-five? That *I Dismember Mama* sported a screenplay by William F. Nolan? That the walking corpse in *Blood of Ghastly Horror* was played by someone named Rich Smedley? I'm just glad I learned all this while I'm still young. —TK

Screen

by Gahan Wilson

Ghost Story (Universal)

Directed by John Irvin

Screenplay by Lawrence D. Cohen

One of the perks associated with doing these little reviews for *The Twilight Zone* is that the reviewer has the privilege of being invited to various types of private screenings so that he may digest the studios' offerings in peace and dignity, removed from contact with ticket vendors and the *hoi polloi*, be able to write his review ahead of the film's release so that his valuable opinions can be printed simultaneously with its opening (unless he works for a publication such as this, in which case he must be regarded as a species of historian), and to enjoy the feeling of getting special little strokes which may, I'm sure it is hoped, tend to make him view the movie in a friendly frame of mind.

These screenings vary along the lines of the accommodations offered on an ocean liner. Third class—unless it is associated with some special party to which you, and hardly anybody else, is invited—consists of a mass preview held in a public theater specially rented for the purpose. The public is warned off by signs erected to inform it that the place has been declared off limits to the common herd (too bad for you if you drove in all the way from Connecticut to catch *Tillie's Folly*) and the staff instructed to admit only those bearing special passes. Special passes to these affairs on all levels always specify that the bearer and one other may be allowed to enter the sanctuary. That way wives and husbands and boyfriends and girlfriends of the reviewers don't get mad.

The people attending these rented theater screenings tend to be composed of people associated with the making of the picture (which results in frantic, partisan cheering when an extra enters the scene or an obscure name in the credits rolls into view), lower-echelon workers for the producer, people who know the lower-echelon workers, their friends piggybacking on the passes, and reviewers who haven't had the



"The lady wasn't a ghost. That was the little joke in Straub's title." In the film version of Peter Straub's *Ghost Story*, the novel's demonic, shape-shifting Eva Gallí becomes—in the person of Alice Krige, above—just another ghost out for revenge.

sense to complain about being held down to this level of screening.

Second-class screenings are held in little private auditoriums tucked away in office buildings, and your pass is accompanied by a little note explaining how to grope your way to them. They are almost always hidden behind a series of innocuous-looking doors and involved hallways. If the screening is intelligently run, a public relations person will greet you effusively at the door and

congratulate you on your last review.

The people attending these screenings are *important* people associated with the making of the picture (who do not indulge in partisan yells, as they know the common mob will do that for them since they are famous and beloved), agents (at this level of society you always have agents), piggybacking friends, and reviewers who have had the sense to complain about being



"... still the sprightliest person in the cast." Fred Astaire poses before Eva Gull's mansion, which—for reasons not explained in the film—appears to have remained vacant for the fifty years since her disappearance.

invited to the third-class levels of screening.

First class is so dizzying I don't know how to describe it, nor even if affairs as glorious and awe-inspiring as this *should* be described in print. If the people knew such wonders existed they might rise up and tear down the society which has barred them from such sybaritic joy, such ecstatic inzyiness. There are no theaters or auditoriums associated with this sort of do, only sumptuous rooms with concealed screens which reveal themselves at the appropriate moment. There are nice things to nibble on, if not a delightful dinner. There is expensive smoke from enormous cigars, and excellent brandy. There are no public relations persons or reviewers. I have been to bashes like this, but never in the capacity of reviewer, and if I ever held such a bash, I wouldn't invite me in that capacity either.

All of the above is very well and good, but if your main residence is in the boondocks, as is mine, you sometimes find it difficult to schedule in these private screenings and must actually view the movie to be reviewed in a public theater actually open to the public, shocking as it sounds. Sometimes this leads to annoying distractions, but sometimes it leads to illuminating

and interesting incidents closely related to the reviewing of a film—as it did with *Ghost Story*.

I had been looking forward for some time with considerable curiosity to seeing *Ghost Story*. I had read the book with much enjoyment, I had discussed it with its author, Peter Straub, and I was most intrigued with the idea of a film starring Fred Astaire, Melvyn Douglas, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., and John Houseman as old duffers. On its opening day I made it my business to trek to Eighty-sixth Street in New York City, have a nice German dinner at the Cafe Geiger, and saunter into the lobby of the theater complex where *Ghost Story* was making its debut so that I might purchase a ticket and see the thing.

The ticket buy went well, but I was only halfway to the stairs leading to the auditorium when I was halted in my tracks by an earnest girl bearing a clipboard. She and a number of other equally earnest girls were conducting a survey, and a serious, carefully constructed survey it was, with sheets of green paper covered with involved questions couched in every form from multiple choice to short essay response.

Ordinarily I do not pause when signaled by a survey person—I

increase my pace and frown into the middle distance—but this intrigued me. I didn't break my rule about not answering questions, mind, I asked them, and found I was in the presence of a fascinating phenomenon: an investigation into the state of mind and the expectations of a human about to see a movie!

It quickly brushed by routine questions about where, when, and how the questioner had come to hear of the movie (one suspects all that was inserted by some doddering bureaucrat who didn't understand the sparkling implications of the survey), and bore down on the nub question: *What are your movie hopes and dreams?* What is that ideal spooky movie you have dancing in your head, the one you have come to see, the one you have gone to so many other palaces of entertainment to see, the one you will probably never see but will take subways and long drives and go to all sorts of botherations for the rest of your life to see? What is it? Tell us, tell us, and maybe we can make it, or at least make something like it, and then advertise it in such a way so that you will think that, just maybe, this time it will be it.

Pages of these questions. And then, at the end, the request for the telephone number of the questioner, so that they might call him later, as an after-viewer, and learn of his disappointments: hear of how, once again, he had failed in his quest, hear how *Ghost Story* had, like all those others, those countless, hoped-for others, fallen short.

Is that a survey? You bet you that's a survey. Congratulations, Alan Ladd and Universal. A tip of the Wilson hat. You guys are into basics!

Yes, Universal, yes, Alan Ladd, *Ghost Story* was, like all the others, something of a letdown. Not quite what I'd hoped for.

It had its moments, Universal, it really did. A lot of talent piled up there, and every so often it worked; every so often, as John Houseman might say, "They earned it." But just every so often, Universal.

I know you're not going to phone me, because I didn't give you my number, but I thought, Gee, it might help if I gave you some

suggestions, tried to point out a few things it might have been wise to handle differently, and, sure, gave you a few pats on the back. Maybe then, just possibly, you might be able to make that movie I've been looking for all these years. Just maybe.

For one thing, Universal, why'd you change the basic idea of the book? It makes me wonder about you moviemakers sometimes, it really does, why you spend all that money for a book and then trash its best parts. Remember, just for instance, what you movie guys did with Steve King's *The Shining*? Remember that? Lots of good stuff there, sure, but why did you throw away the ending? The whole book led up to that ending, guys. Didn't you notice? It ended with a real bang, literally, and you fellows ended it with a whimper. Why? I'm just curious. I just wondered.

I know you're trying. You hired Larry Cohen to do the screen adaptation, and he did *Carrie*, and certainly that was a highly successful job, so it made sense to hire Larry; I can see how your minds were working.

But he changed the point of the book, fellows! The lady *wasn't* a ghost, see? That was the little joke in Straub's title. She was a monster, a strictly nonhuman, Lovecraftian thing. An evil so alien to us that there just isn't any possibility of our comprehending its motives. And you made her into a lady phantom. Why?

Or, since you did, why didn't you make her into a lady phantom? Why did you hire Alice Krige to do a really terrific, first-rate job of playing the role of the lady phantom exactly as she should if she were playing Peter Straub's monster? If she were playing Peter Straub's monster, her terrific, scary smile and the way her eyes would sort of drift eerily off, and the really lovely job she did of implying an impeccable, abstract hatred for our species, would have been perfect. But they don't make sense when she's a ghost, not even if she's a particularly mean ghost, and they *really* don't when she's presented in the movie as a flesh and blood living human being. Honest. It gets you into motivational problems and



"Old duffers." John Houseman, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., and the late Melvyn Douglas comprise the remaining members of The Chowder Society, a club of small-town gentlemen who share a sinister secret.

things like that. One question you might put into future questionnaires is: Do you hope and dream for logical, consistent behavior in the characters of the movie you are about to see? I'll bet you lots of people answer yes.

Now there were a lot of things which were very good about *Ghost Story*, Universal, and I'll be happy to list them.

First and foremost was Fred Astaire: my hopes and dreams concerning the job he'd do were fully realized—as, come to think of it, they have been much more often than not in the past. He is lined and squinty now, and there's an old-man croak and quaver in the voice, but he is still, as he always was in every movie he ever made, the sprightliest person in the cast, and he does a scene with Patricia Neal (who is very good in what little you see of her) wherein he promises to take her to the South of France which is as good as anything he did with Ginger Rogers. The other old gents turn in good jobs, but they would have all looked a lot better if they weren't suffering comparison with the dancer.

Dick Smith is good, as usual, continuing to be the best creator of involved and bizarre makeup and costumery in the business today. His most elaborate work to date is *Altered States*, and I do believe he is the only makeup artist yet to arrange to have the tip of a man's nose sliced off onscreen. In *Ghost Story* he is asked to deliver too much, I'm afraid. This is not to say he didn't create an absolutely first-rate gruesome whatsis—or rather an

involved series of gruesome whatsis, as there are many, many, many scenes where the whatsis appears and is supposed to shock you all over again—it's that the writer and John Irvin, the director, ask too much of it. As long as a whatsis is essentially the same whatsis, no matter how god-awful, no matter how cleverly little changes are rung on it, you get used to it. There is no way to bring the thing on time after time ("Hey, here I am again, everyone—GAAAW!!!!") without steadily decreasing its impact. Not even if you hire somebody as ingenious as Smith. His speciality may be monsters, but he's only human.

I mentioned that Alice Krige was excellent as Straub's monster, and I think it's pretty safe to predict that, barring some really stupid handling of her talents, she is destined to be one of the very, very big stars. I only wish she hadn't been crossed up by the fundamental blunder of the adaptation.

Excellent also is Jack Cardiff's photography, which explores winter and nostalgia with equal skill, contrasting a golden past and an icy present most effectively. And, too, there is a very sinister performance turned in by Miguel Fernandes, who will bear watching.

But the best thing, Universal, the high point in your movie, is the look Fred Astaire gives the dying monster—a look unique, I think, in all the long history of dying monsters in movies and the looks given them by their destroyers. Not triumph, this time, not horror, but pity. A long, regretful look of pity. 17

Music

by Jack Sullivan

In this, our third column on spectral music, we consider modern composers who are not ghostly or otherworldly in their general output but who wrote notable individual masterworks in the form. It is remarkable how many basically tonal twentieth-century composers—including Sergei Rachmaninoff (*The Isle of the Dead*), John Ireland (*Legend, Decorations*), Lili Boulanger (*Pie Jesu*), Andre Jolivet (*Piano Concerto*), and Samuel Barber (*Medea's Meditation and Dance of Vengeance*)—flirted with the macabre during the more experimental moments in their otherwise conservative careers.

Although many of these outre experiments have become absorbed into the mainstream, a few still retain their disturbing edge. One of the most startling of all is Darius Milhaud's music for Aeschylus's tragedy *The Libation Bearers*. Violent, brooding, and consistently haunting, Milhaud's revolutionary 1916 score features dense chords in two, sometimes three keys at once. While experimenting with these polytonal chords, Milhaud wrote that he found them "more subtly sweet, more violently potent" than tonal ones. In addition, to capture what he called the "savage, cannibal"

emotions unleashed by the play, Milhaud abandoned lyricism altogether in several vocal sections and had the singers speak the text in an eerie, incantatory style, accompanied by an earth-shaking battery of percussion. The result is an unsettling, rarely performed masterpiece by a composer generally known for jazzy, genial lyricism. Leonard Bernstein recorded *The Libation Bearers* twenty years ago, in a performance accurately described by composer William

Leonard Bernstein recorded The Libation Bearers twenty years ago in a performance accurately described as 'bloodcurdling.'

Flanagan as "bloodcurdling." The deleted original, which had rich if somewhat compressed sound, has been restored on Columbia's "Special Products" label (Milhaud, "Les Choephores" ["The Libation Bearers"], Leonard Bernstein, New York Philharmonic: Columbia CSP AMS-6396). Collectors should grab it before it disappears again: it is one of Bernstein's greatest and most valuable recordings.

Another surprising item is the gut-wrenching Fourth Symphony of Ralph Vaughn Williams (Vaughn Williams, Symphony No. 4, Sir Adrian Boult, London Philharmonic: Angel S-36557), a composer normally associated with the pastoral mode. Actually, a fair amount of Vaughn Williams is unsettling: listen to the unearthly pianissimo finale of the Sixth Symphony, composed in 1948 (Vaughn Williams, Symphony No. 6, Sir Adrian Boult, London

Philharmonic: Angel S-36469), the craggy fortissimos for organ and orchestra in 1930's *Job* (Vaughn Williams, "Job—A Masque for Dancing," Sir Adrian Boult, London Symphony: Angel S-536773), the tragic bleakness of his 1937 opera *Riders to the Sea* (Vaughn Williams, "Riders to the Sea," Helen Watts, Meredith Davies, et al: Angel S-36819)—not to mention the positively shuddery late music covered in our next column. Collectors should be warned that RCA is gradually deleting Andre Previn's magnificent traversal of the Vaughn Williams symphonies. Already gone is the Fourth (Vaughn Williams, Symphony No. 4, Andre Previn, London Symphony: RCA LSC-31780P), a performance even more gripping than the still-available Boult version cited above. Critics generally give Boult's performances higher marks than Previn's, but I am convinced that this bias has more to do with an abstract notion of Boult's authentic "Britishness" than with what is actually on the records.

Another moody British composer



is Benjamin Britten, whose "Four Sea Interludes" from the opera *Peter Grimes* (1945) have a wonderfully brooding seascape atmosphere. No one has conducted his music more lovingly or expressively than the composer himself, and his recording with the London Symphony (Britten, "Four Sea Interludes," Benjamin Britten, London Symphony: London 6179) communicates an irresistible aura of mystery and magic.

A more popular British work is Gustav Holst's *The Planets* (1918), although a great deal of this pleasant piece is surprisingly unspectacular. The recording to have is by Bernard Haitink, whose "Mars" is a "Bringer of War" indeed and whose "Neptune," for once sounding properly ethereal, is truly a "Mystic." (Fans of Bernard Herrmann should pay close attention to "Neptune," which seems to have inspired some of Herrmann's most characteristic chord patterns and atmospheric touches.) For the

so weirdly ambiguous, its structure so fragmented, and its orchestration so dark that the effect is one of ominous instability. Pianist Vladimir Ashkenazy, who has recently launched a conducting career, offers the symphony in pristine digital sound (Sibelius, *Symphony No. 4*, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Philharmonia Orchestra: London LDR 71019). Some critics complain about the "chilly" ambience of digital recordings, but that is precisely the atmosphere called for here. A good analog version is Herbert Van Karajan's (Sibelius, *Symphony No. 4*, Herbert Van Karajan, Berlin Philharmonic: Angel S-37462). On the same record is a haunting performance of *Tapiola* (1925), Sibelius's last and darkest work, which evokes what the composer called "the wood-sprites in the gloom" of "the Northland's dusky forests." Gloom is indeed the dominant emotion in *Tapiola*, but the long final chord, stretched by Karajan to a breathtaking length,

Sibelius's last and darkest work evokes what the composer called 'the wood-sprites in the gloom' of 'the Northland's dusky forests.'

budget-conscious, Bernstein's old version—a rather hard-driven but thoroughly exciting reading—has been remastered with surprisingly vivid sound for the CBS "Great Performance" series (Holst, "The Planets," Leonard Bernstein, New York Philharmonic: Columbia MY 37226).

Another conservative composer from the early twentieth century who occasionally dabbled in spectral music was Jean Sibelius. Known mainly for lush romanticism (the First and Second Symphonies) and patriotic fervor (*Finlandia*), Sibelius reversed himself in the Fourth Symphony (1910) to create a chillingly bleak symphonic landscape based on the accumulation of tiny motifs. Sibelius was never an aggressively "modern" composer, and the Fourth Symphony contains nothing nontonal, but its tonality is

transports the listener to the heights.

Sibelius's music, once extraordinarily popular, has fallen a bit out of favor in concert halls (recordings are another story entirely), but its decline is mild compared to the recent nosedive taken by the music of Paul Hindemith. The musical intelligentsia, composers and critics alike, loves to hate Hindemith, who is denounced as too "conservative" by the modernists and too "gray" by the romantics. Actually, much of Hindemith's music, full of biting counterpoint and stirring melody, is vital and satisfying. There is also a stark, menacing side to Hindemith's personality which often catches the listener by surprise. It can be heard in its full ferocity in the "Temptations of St. Anthony," the demonic finale to the symphony

Mathis der Maler (1940). The most moving version of this symphony, which ends with an exhilarating peroration for brass marked "alleluia," is the last record made by the late Jascha Horenstein (Hindemith, "Mathis der Maler," Jascha Horenstein, London Symphony: Nonesuch H-71307), a budget recording which also includes, appropriately enough, Strauss's *Death and Transfiguration*—itself one of the more ghostly offerings in its composer's canon.

A more relentlessly disturbing Hindemith piece is the early Concert Music for Strings and Brass (1930), a brilliantly orchestrated work full of eerie string sonorities and ominous growls in the low brass. A lucid account is given by the Boston Symphony (Hindemith, *Concert Music for Strings and Brass*, William Steinberg, Boston Symphony: Deutsche Grammophon 2530246), but the deleted Bernstein version on Columbia is worth a search. It is a hair-raising performance. An ardent champion of Hindemith, Bernstein also delivers a stunning account of the neglected Symphony in E-Flat (Hindemith, *Symphony in E-Flat*, Leonard Bernstein, New York Philharmonic: Columbia MS-7426). Not all of this symphony is spectral, but the long funeral march in the middle is one of the most gorgeously gloomy slow movements in twentieth-century music.

Since Americans and women are two categories of composer which are notoriously neglected, Ruth Crawford Seeger's powerful String Quartet (1931), available on a splendid budget recording, deserves special mention (Ruth Crawford Seeger, *String Quartet*, Composer's Quartet: Nonesuch 71280). This piece is as austere, spare, and moving as the music of Carl Ruggles, with which it shares a peculiarly American kind of ruggedness.

To conclude on a more sumptuous note, several works of Prokofiev and Mahler offer weird treats on a grand scale. Prokofiev is famous for his quicksilver alternations between the caustic and the romantic, but much of his early

Not all of Hindemith's Symphony in E-Flat is spectral, but the long funeral march in the middle is one of the most gorgeously gloomy slow movements in twentieth-century music.

music—including the Second and Third Symphonies and the apocalyptic cantata *They Are Seven*—are tense and fearful (Prokofiev, "The Early Symphonies," Jean Martinon, Orchestre National de L'ORTF: 3-Vox SVBX 5123. "They Are Seven," Gennady Rozhdestvensky, Moscow Radio Symphony: Quintessence 7196). Prokofiev's richest work in this vein is the *Scythian Suite* (1914). According to Lawrence Gilman, its spine-tingling

finale "limns for us a Pagan dawn as seen through the savagely ecstatic eyes and frenzied brains of sun-worshipping barbarians.... [It is] like nothing else in the literature of music." The old Dorati recording on Mercury still packs an impressive wallop, as do virtually all the Mercury recordings from the fifties and sixties (Prokofiev, "The Scythian Suite," Antal Dorati, London Symphony: Mercury 75030).

An even more bloated and

grandiose canvas of nightmare is offered in some of the epic symphonies of Gustav Mahler. The ones to listen for are the Sixth, with its brutal death-knells, the "Night Music" sections of the Seventh, and the Bergian orchestral outcry in the Adagio of the Tenth. (Mahler, Symphony No. 6, James Levine, London Symphony: 2-RC ARL2 3213. Symphony No. 7, Georg Solti, Chicago Symphony: 2-London 2231. Symphony No. 10 [Adagio only], Pierre Boulez, London Symphony: 2-Columbia, M2 30061). The surprise ending of the Sixth, especially in James Levine's impeccably timed performance, is perhaps the most jolting conclusion in all of music. Mahler, who once said that a symphony should encompass the entire world, knew that a good portion of that world encompasses mystery and horror.

Next month: *Spectral Composers of the Postwar Era.* 12

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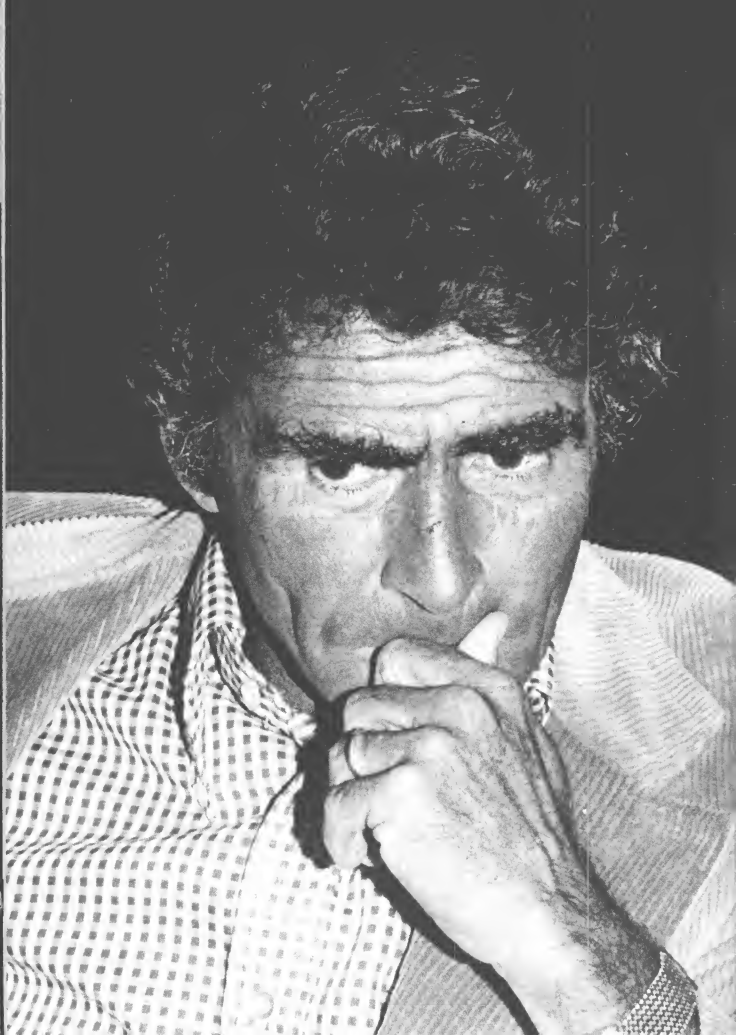
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Rod Serling: The Facts of Life

IN HIS FINAL MAJOR INTERVIEW, NOW PUBLISHED FOR THE FIRST TIME IN ITS ORIGINAL FORM, THE MAN WHO CREATED 'THE TWILIGHT ZONE' TAKES A HARD LOOK AT THE TV NETWORKS, THE WRITING GAME, AND HIS OWN CAREER.

Rod Serling's last interview took place at Franco's La Taverna on Sunset Strip on March 4, 1975—just a few months prior to his sudden death at fifty. The restaurant was a favorite hangout of Serling's, a place where he could observe a wide range of human types who might conceivably become models for characters in his scripts—and where, as a celebrity, he was often observed by them as well.

Serling was as cooperative an interviewee as I have ever met. There was no pre-rehearsed or packaged dialogue, no bored or weary let's-get-this-over-with routines such as one so often finds in the famous. Without getting side-tracked, I found it easy to take in his wit, compassion, and crusading spirit.

I regret that he was unable to complete the screenplay he was writing (an adaptation of Morris West's *The Salamander*). Looking back, it seems the frequent references to mortality lent a haunting foreshadowing to his untimely death, and only now, as his words come drifting back, do I wonder if he knew our interview would be his last.

"I've never planned ahead," he told me. "I just sort of go through life checking the menu of three meals that day. I never worry about tomorrow. It's only since I've gotten older that I've begun to wonder about time running out. Is it sufficient unto itself that I don't plan? Because maybe next Thursday won't come one day. And then, I'm concerned about that. But that's not uniquely the writer's

concern, that's the concern of every middle-aged man who looks in the mirror."

I miss the full-bodied voice now faded from the airwaves, except for occasional reruns of *Twilight Zone* and *Night Gallery* at ungodly hours on local tv stations. As for Franco's, it too is now gone—having been replaced by another establishment not long after Serling's death. But I can't think of a more appropriate epitaph than what was said that day.

—Linda Brevelle

Brevelle: You've been cited for your outstanding achievements in writing in the dramatic form. You have won countless awards, including six Emmies, the Peabody, and Sylvania awards. Your peers and the public respect your talent. Rod Serling is a household name. My question is, where do you go from here? How can you top your previous record if you have any real need to top yourself?

Serling: Well, first of all, I've never really topped myself, because awards in themselves really don't reflect major accomplishment. It's kind of a strange, backslapping ritual that we go through in this town where you get awards for almost everything. For surviving the day you're going to get awards. So I can't suggest that those things represent any pinnacle of achievement. If indeed they did, I suppose I'd be worried about how to I top myself. But if indeed I'm a household name, it's a fortuitous event, really singularly undeserved, and caused by a whole lot of extraneous, fortuitous things that have oc-

curred. But again, it's part of the business of really not caring about topping myself because I really don't care what's going to happen. I think just surviving is a major thing. I'd like to write something that my peers, my colleagues, my fellow writers would find a source of respect. I think I'd rather win, for example, a Writer's Guild award than almost anything on earth. And the few nominations I've had with the guild, and the few awards I've had, represented to me a far more legitimate concrete achievement than anything. Emmies, for example, most of that's bullshit. Oscars are even worse. We have a strange, terrible affliction in this town. Everybody walks around bent-backed from slapping each other on the backs so much. It looks like arthritis but it isn't. It's hunger for recognition. And it's sort of like, well, I'll scratch you this time if you'll scratch me next time. That kind of thing.

Brevelle: Is it really true what they say in Hollywood that most of it is luck or a big push from the right person at the right time in the right direction?

Serling: I think a lot of it is luck and continues to be. That in no way discounts the terrible urgency that you have talent. It's always who you know, what marvelous moment in time that you find him or meet him. I think one of the problems sometimes with the writer is the personality of the writer, because it becomes a very personal medium. Selling yourself is sometimes almost half the problem. If

"You must always assume that the relationship between writer and producer is that of adversaries. They may be your dearest friends, and they'll invite you to dinner, but when all the smoke clears and the ozone lifts, your enemy is the producer."

you meet a producer, you have a story in mind, if you're not personable—you know, if you're a shit, you can't deal with people—frequently that negativism moves over into the script area. If the producer doesn't like you, consequently he reads the script with a very negative view. But I wouldn't preoccupy myself with that, I don't give a damn. You can be a hunchback and a dwarf and what-all. If you write beautifully, you write beautifully, that's all.

Breville: Do you recall your breaking into this business, making your first sale?

Serling: It's an incredible event. The most important thing about the first sale is for the very first time in your life something written has value and proven value because somebody has given you money for the words that you've written, and that's terribly important, it's a tremendous boon to the ego, to your sense of self-reliance, to your feeling about your own talent. I remember the first sale I made was a hundred and fifty dollars for a radio script, and, as poor as I was, I didn't cash the check for three months. I kept showing it to people.

Breville: In the past when you were starting a writing career, how did you deal with rejection? Has it gotten any easier?

Serling: It's gotten easier because now it's only a blow to ego, it's no longer a blow to pocketbook. I'm sufficiently independent to know that I can live well and comfortably all the rest of my life whether I'm rejected or not. In the old days, Linda, you were rejected, and not only was a piece of your flesh cut to pieces, your pocketbook was destroyed. You know—you don't have bread for rent.

Breville: Writers didn't get the same money for their work they get these days.

Serling: That's right, that's right. You can become much more independent, much more courageous with a bank account. And also, much more independent and self-reliant when you know you have money behind you. But rejection is still rejection. It's a very difficult, bleeding process.

Breville: Do you have any encouragement for writers who accumulate a lot of rejection slips?

Serling: Only that somehow, some way, incredibly enough, good writing ultimately gets recognized. I don't

know how that happens but it does. If you're really a good writer and deserve that honored position, then by God, you'll write, and you'll be read, and you'll be produced somehow. It just works that way. If you're just a simple ordinary day-to-day craftsman, no different than most, then the likelihood is that you probably won't make it in writing. You're going to wind up either getting married, working for an insurance company, joining the regular army, or what-all. But if you have a spark in you, a cut above the average, I think ultimately you make it.

Breville: Should a writer who makes his first sale hold out for money or sell for the credit?

Serling: Well, actually that carries with it the suggestion that he has an option. Usually he doesn't. Most shows, buying shows, have a standard fee for the first shot of the writer and if you have a very militant agent, I suppose he might jack it up four percent or something. But in essence, you sell for what is the going rate. I don't think you're going to be penalized for virtue of the fact that you're not known and suddenly find yourself getting minimum for it. No, I don't think that will happen. Conversely, you're not going to get top of show, either. But that's the nature of it. But I would guess that the price of the script really is secondary. The credit is much more the essence.

Breville: You were a member of the Council of the Writer's Guild of America, West from 1965 to '67. A young screenwriter was quoted as saying a lot of young writers are very anti-union and not interested in becoming a Guild member. For those who are critical of the union, what would you say to them in defense of the WGA?

Serling: Well, I think the essence of the argument has always been, first of all, the Guild doesn't want writing on spec. And that's been a major problem over the years. But obviously, to the young writer that's unfair

and it's discriminatory, and it can be very hurtful to one's career. But over the long haul, the minute that you establish the propriety of writing on speculation, then you're destroyed by it. It's the beast that will bite you. Because you're going to find yourself over the years, much later on, exposed to five thousand writers who will write speculatively, and it's cheap-jack labor just like in any Depression situation. They'll go pay a fruitpicker five cents an hour if they can get him. And the rest of us will starve. And that's what's going to happen on the basis of speculative writing. People are going to starve, because a lot of hungry sons of bitches are going to take advantage of us.

You must always assume that the relationship between writer and producer is that of adversaries—however you slice it. They may be your dearest friends, and they'll invite you to dinner, but when all the smoke clears and the ozone lifts, your enemy is the producer, that's the guy you're competing with, and you have to battle him, just as if you were an adversary. So I would have to say that the Guild is well advised to lay down certain rules that they do lay out.

Breville: What has been your relationship with agents?

Serling: I don't have close relationships with agents. They're friends, but they're not confidants. I don't know too many agents that analytically read properly. The good agent probably is not the reader, he's just the guy who can put together a deal. It would be a marvelous asset if there were a literate man who could read stuff and make judgments. Not too many are.

Breville: Do you ever get tired of talking about writing?

Serling: That essentially is my craft. If I don't know about that, I don't know about anything. My concern about that is that ... Well, the other night I met William Goldman at a party. He wrote *Boys and Girls Together* and a few others. And I looked

at him in awe, because he's written novels—brilliant novels that I've never been able to write—and so when I'm chosen to do an interview on writing I think to myself, "My God, what am I doing here? Why isn't William Goldman sitting here with you?—who could tell you probably a helluva lot more than I can."

Brevelle: What are you currently writing that you're excited about?

Serling: I just finished a—I'm not exactly excited about it—but I just finished a Movie of the Week for ABC for Aaron Spelling called *Where the Dead Are*, which is a gothic horror piece. And I'm doing a screenplay for Carlo Ponti in Italy based on the Morris West novel, *The Salamander*, which is a ball-breaking script, very difficult. That's what I left today to meet you here.

Brevelle: Foolish!

Serling: No! It's great to get away from it. It's beginning to destroy me piecemeal.

Brevelle: What do you do to avoid writing? I know that sounds funny...

Serling: Everything. Everything.

Brevelle: And your friends? How do they avoid writing?

Serling: I don't know what my friends do. Generally they become producers. That way they can stop writing! It's the only way really to get the monkey off the back. But in the last three months I've been so busy writing that I really haven't been able to conjure up the luxury of excuses to keep from writing because I'm on a clock and I have a deadline. But there are millions of ways to not be writing. You say you're not in the mood, you'll pick it up tomorrow. You can take on interviews with pretty girls. (Grins)

That's a cop-out right there. That's natural and normal, because I don't think it's man's function to write. I don't think it's a normal thing like teeth-brushing and going to the bathroom. It's a supered position on the animal.

Brevelle: What causes you to write?
Serling: I never really thought about it. If I could really conjure up an answer to that, I suppose I'd be able to answer a lot of questions that bug me.

Why do I write? I guess that's been asked of every writer. I don't know. It isn't any massive compulsion. I don't feel, you know, God dic-

tated that I should write. You know, thunder rents the sky and a bony finger comes down from the clouds and says, "You. You write. You're the anointed." I never felt that. I suppose it's part compulsion, part a channel for what your brain is churning up.

But I don't subscribe to the "Know Thyself" theory. I'm afraid that if I started to ponder who I am and what I am, I might not like what I find. So, I'd rather go along with this sense of illusion that I'm a neutral beast going along through life doing everything that's preordained. I'm out of control anyway, so why fight it. I suppose we think euphemistically that all writers write because they have something to say that is truthful and honest and pointed and important. And I suppose I subscribe to that, too. But God knows when I look back over thirty years of professional writing, I'm hard-pressed to come up with anything that's impor-

"The first sale I made was a hundred and fifty dollars for a radio script. As poor as I was, I didn't cash the check for three months. I kept showing it to people."

tant. Some things are literate, some things are interesting, some things are classy, but very damn little is important.

Brevelle: Is there a script you've been holding onto in your mind that you really want to write?

Serling: Nope.

Brevelle: You've written it all?

Serling: I've written all that I've wanted to write to date. This is not to say I might not find something. I mean, I'm not an old man. I'm not a young man, admittedly, but I'm not an old man, either.

Brevelle: Who do you write for?

Serling: Myself. If I enjoy it.

Brevelle: What do you enjoy about writing?

Serling: I don't enjoy any of the process of writing. I enjoy it when it goes on if it zings and it has great warmth and import and it's successful. Yeah, that's when I enjoy it. But during the desperate, tough time of creating it, there's not much I enjoy about it. It tires me and lays me out, which is sort of the way I feel now. Tired.

Brevelle: So it's a suffering process for you...

Serling: It is. Giving birth, you know. Waiting. Should we call the doctor? You know, for the caesarean. It's obviously not going to come out normally.

Brevelle: What is most difficult for you about writing?

Serling: In terms of screenplay adaptations it's trying to cut out stuff that's extraneous, without doing damage to the original piece, because you owe a debt of some respect to the original author. That's why it was bought.

That's been the problem with this current project, *The Salamander*. It's a big book, very heavy with people and complexities and interwoven plotlines. I'm finding it very difficult to decide what can I cut away without doing damage. Or without leaving an audience saying, "Well, wait a minute. How did he come into this? I never saw him before. Who's this

person?" That kind of thing.

Brevelle: What's your system for getting writing done? You know, some writers use colored paper, others write in longhand on legal pads...

Serling: I don't have any system. I dictate a lot, through a machine, and I also have a secretary. But I used to type just like everybody else. I find dictating in the mass media particularly good because you're writing for voice anyway; you're writing for people to say a line and, consequently, saying a line through a machine is quite a valid test for the validity of what you're saying. If it sounds good as you say it, likely as not it'll sound good when an actor's saying it. The tendency when you dictate is to over-write, because you're not counting pages, you don't really know what the hell the page count is. But in terms of standing up when I write, what hour I write, that all relates very specifically to the individual. Writers vary tremendously. Was it Tom Wolfe who stood up or was it Hemingway who had to stand up? I

don't know.

Breville: Hemingway. He had to space three times between words to slow down.

Serling: Was it Hemingway who had to put the thing on the mantel or something? And I think Wolfe wrote in longhand. You know, it depends on the animal, particularly who's doing it. In my case, the only thing I would say was part of the discipline is that I have to start writing quite early. I write much better in the nonconfines of the early morning than I do the clutter of the day.

Breville: How much time do you spend actually writing?

Serling: I would guess three full hours a day, and in terms of the pre-writing activity, God, that's endless, it's constant, almost constant.

Breville: Can you write when you're angry or depressed?

Serling: Yes, I think so, except very frequently—and I'm not alone in this—your depression and your anger find their way onto the page, and if you're writing a comedy that can be very damaging.

Breville: What makes you angry?

Serling: Interesting question ... Some petty things, really. But bias

(ed. note: *Sherman Oaks Experimental College, Hollywood*) about a near-fatal experience you had in the Philippines during the war. A Japanese soldier aimed his gun at you, you knew he would get off a clean shot and kill you. He couldn't miss, there was nothing you could do to avoid being a perfect target. As you stood frozen in time, unable to move, a fellow G.I. shot the enemy soldier over your shoulder ...

Serling: That incident, yeah. Well, that was sort of symptomatic of the way I was. Fatalist, you know. About everything. And I survived through no dint of my own courage; it was just somebody up there. But professionally, when I first went into freelancing, I think there was a period of about eight months when *nothing* happened. Everything that I wrote crumbled up, and then it became a self-destructive thing—when you begin to doubt yourself, when doubt turns into—it's sort of like impotence. Once impotent, you're forever impotent. Because you're always worried about being impotent.

Breville: Fear of fear.

Serling: I'm told, Linda, I'm told.

Breville: How did you get out of

tive than that!

Breville: If you could, would you go back to live tv instead of filmed tv?

Serling: No.

Breville: Do you miss those days? The urgency, the excitement ...?

Serling: I miss ... I miss the comradery of live television—the fact that you were on the set, you worked closely with the director and the cast, that I miss. But, no, I'm happy, I'm happy doing film.

Breville: What did you feel about making the transition from live television to film?

Serling: It wasn't very difficult. Essentially, the scripts are not that different. Let's say, in literary terms, it's the difference between writing horizontally and writing vertically. In live television, you wrote much more vertically. You had to probe people because you didn't have money or sets or any of the physical dimensions that film will allow you. So you generally probed people a little bit more. Film writing is much more horizontal. You can insert anything you want: meadows, battlefields, the Taj Mahal, a cast of thousands. But essentially, writing a story is writing a story. And certainly there are differences in technique and in attitude. The major difference frequently is in time. The motion picture, for example, gives you considerably more freedom of expression than does the confined thirty-minute television show. But in essence, they're not that dissimilar.

Breville: Are teleplays today as innovative and fresh as in the fifties?

Serling: Yeah, I think they are, except that they have to much more hew to the line because most of them are series that have to use people who are pre-set in the series. Unlike the old days when the anthology ruled the roost, you could write a different play each week.

Breville: Did you find there were any more taboos in television in those days than in movies?

Serling: Oh, infinitely more taboos, on television. Oh, yeah. Even then you could do much more in movies than you could on tv, and even movies were heavily censored. But in television, the areas of timorousness were fairly laid out. Race relations. Sex. Politics. There was a whole conglomeration of taboo themes. And even to date, though television has become a much freer medium, it's

"I don't enjoy the process of writing. During the desperate, tough time of creating it, there's not much I enjoy. It tires me and lays me out."

and prejudice make me angry ... more than anything. Somebody sent me a copy of the American Nazi newspaper the other day—published in, I guess, Arlington, Virginia—there were words in it like "coon" and "kike" and things like that, and I was very distraught. That made me terribly angry. Viciously angry. Even to creating daydreams about how I could go there and bump off some of these pricks. But it's short-lived. I'm much too logical for that. That ticks me off. I can't think of anything else that really makes me angry.

Breville: What was the lowest point of your life? Emotionally.

Serling: Emotionally? I think that was during the war. I was convinced I wasn't going to come back.

Breville: You told a story in class

that or did it just run its course?

Serling: Oh, it ran its course. I made a sale. It's as simple as that, a little funny external thing like that. And that's all it took.

Breville: Tell me, is the magic still there? About writing?

Serling: Oh, yeah. There always is. If it weren't, I wouldn't be doing it. I'd go back in the regular army and ... live my life.

Breville: If you weren't writing, what would you do?

Serling: What would be the second choice? Jesus, I've never really thought about it. I'd make a marvelous retiree.

Breville: Just sit back by the pool and—

Serling: I couldn't sit by the pool, I'd have to do something a bit more ac-

"You can say 'death' all you want. You can say 'kill.' You can even say 'rape' now. But you can't say 'hell' or 'damn.' You know, it's going to reach a point where you're going to do a travelogue on Holland and you'll say, 'Well, here we are in Rottergosh and Amsterdarn!'"

still far less free, far less creatively untrammelled than are the movies. They're infinitely more adult in that respect.

Breville: What script changes have you most vehemently rebelled against because of tv censorship?

Serling: I haven't rebelled vehemently against any of them. I have compromised down the line. I've disliked it intensely in the old days when you were trying to talk race relations and they would not allow you to talk about the legitimacies of race relations. In the old days, you didn't talk about black, you talked about Eskimo or American Indian, and the American Indian was assumed not to be a problem area. Now we realize that they, too, are, in terms of their altogether legitimate concerns. I find it very difficult to live through the censorship of profanity on television. I find that the most ludicrous of the censorships. Damn. Hell. Goddamn. And all that. I find that it's part of our colloquial language, and that there's nothing sacrilegious or profane about any of it. It's the way we speak. What the hell is so dirty about the word "hell?" And you can say "death" all you want. You can say "kill." You can even say "rape" now. And that's not supposed to be bad. But you can't say "hell" or "damn." You know, it's going to reach a point where you're going to do a travelogue on Holland and you'll say, "Well, here we are in Rottergosh and Amsterdarn!"

Breville: Is a dramatist of your calibre expected to make script changes dictated by the powers-that-be, producers and the network?

Serling: Absolutely. You have to compromise all the way down the line no matter who you are. Unless, of course—you say I'm an affluent screenwriter and all that—I'm a known screenwriter, but I'm not in the fraternity of the very, very major people. I would say a guy like Ernie Lehman, William Goldman, and a few others are quite a cut above. There's a marvelous and unique man named Frank Gilroy. He's the only writer I know who absolutely, pointedly re-

fuses to do any changes that he doesn't feel are absolutely essential and totally in keeping with his own view and perspective. But not too many writers are that independent and that strong-willed.

Breville: Have you ever removed your name from the credits because of changes that didn't meet your approval?

Serling: No, I don't think I ever have. I wanted to a couple of times. But I found out too late and I couldn't remove it, but I wanted to.

Breville: What projects were those?

Serling: I think one was an old *Studio One* and another was ... I think *Night Gallery*.

Breville: Do you think you can say more about topics of social significance through a contemporary drama or more through the framework of science fiction and fantasy?

Serling: I think you can say more obviously in the framework of an honest-to-Christ contemporary piece so that you don't have to talk in parables, in symbolisms and the rest of it, but this is not to say that you can't make a point of social criticism using science fiction or fantasy as your backdrop. We did that on *Twilight Zone* a lot, but there's no room for that kind of subtlety anymore. The problems are so much with us that they have to be attacked directly.

Breville: What contemporary issues are you most eager to write about but feel restricted by network and sponsor censorship?

Serling: I suppose there's only one now and that's politics. The ... what do we call it—the Nixon mentality. I'd love to be able to write an in-depth piece on what causes men like Nixon and Haldeman and Ehrlichman and all the rest of them not only to run, but what causes us to vote for them.

Breville: What teleplays that you've read do you think stand up as good on paper but not as good after they've been shot?

Serling: Jeez, there may be legion. I know one on *Night Gallery*, for example. I did a show called "The Different Ones," about a boy who was a

freak and ultimately he was sent to a different planet where he would be more accepted.

It was beautiful, a very sensitive screenplay which was a piece of shit when it was done. It was a kind of an American International bug-eyed monster kind of film which it wasn't intended to be at all. Chuck Beaumont, God rest his soul, could tell you a lot about this because he had many shows on. *The Circus of Dr. Lao* was Chuck's, and he always deeply resented what they did in the film. I would guess that Ray Bradbury would be equally resentful of what they did with *Illustrated Man*, which, you know, took a central idea thesis of his and pissed all over it—made it into one of the worst movies ever made.

Breville: Are you frequently surprised by the way actors interpret lines that you've written?

Serling: Yeah, I'm frequently surprised, sometimes bugged off, and sometimes happy, depending on the actor. It's a fact of life that just as often as not an actor can breathe life into a line as he can destroy it by misinterpretation, and I've been blessed frequently by having good actors. You get certain guys like Klugman—Jack Klugman—Jack Warden, Marty Balsam—solid, dependable, consummately skilled men, who invariably take lines and breathe great life into them, and great vibrance, and great truth.

Breville: What can a director's interpretation do for a script?

Serling: Depends very much on the director. There are directors like Frankenheimer, Schaffner, George Roy Hill, Bob Parrish, who are interpretively the tops. Very creative guys. Also the writer who turns director, uniquely, is sensitive to this—a guy like Richard Brooks. And then, occasionally you'll come a cropper with a director who fancies himself the whole creator, who will dictate interpretively different things that are quite incorrect as they stand. But again, it depends on the individual. But over the long haul I'd say that most directors I've worked with have been pretty sensitive to the quality of the interpreted scenes.

Breville: Do you have a script of your own that you have special feeling for?

Serling: I'm thinking about that ...

"If I had the means, I think I would like to be in Victorian times. Small town. Bandstands. Summer. A simpler form of existence, when you walked to a store and sat on the front porch. That's what I think I would like to do: rock for the rest of my life."

Well, I guess "Requiem for a Heavyweight" as old as it is was as honest a piece as I've ever done. "Tearing Down Tim Reilly's Bar" (from *Night Gallery*) was one of my favorites. And then one that I just wrote called "The Stop Along the Way," which is, I think, a lovely script. But I don't know, there are a lot I'm proud of, and a lot I wish the hell I'd never written.

Breville: How important is the screenplay to overall production?

Serling: You've got to be joking!

Breville: No. A lot of people would say it's just a blueprint.

Serling: I'd say ... sixty percent of it. No, no, that varies. No, let's pursue that a minute. An Ingmar Bergman film would probably owe a sizeable bulk of its import and its direction and its quality to the directorial end and to the director because it's uniquely a Bergman film. But that again is not the general—no, that's much more the exception than the rule.

Most screenplays, most motion pictures, owe much more to the screenplay. He has such an economy of language, so little language in his piece, it is so visual, his moods are introduced and buttressed by camera rather than by word or character. But again, that's unique.

Breville: Someone like Bergman's a total filmmaker. Have you ever thought of having your own production company and doing what you want to do?

Serling: No. I just want to write. I—well, I couldn't direct because I'm too impatient and I couldn't put together a package because I don't understand money. I'd rather just do what I'm doing. Do I want to start my own production company? No, I doubt it. I'm too old for that. I don't want to start anything.

Breville: Do you think writers are better off producing their own scripts through independent financing?

Serling: I suppose so because that carries with it a degree of creative freedom that they wouldn't get working with a major company.

Breville: What do you think entering the television writing arena does for a writer's sensitivities?

Serling: It probably bends them out of shape. It frustrates—makes him feel inferior. It makes him deathly preoccupied with his own value and

his own worth, and if he is even normally sensitive, he will very likely weep the rest of his life and also wind up with a terrible, terrible lack of awareness of his own worth. Because people are put down in television now, not because they're not qualitative, not because they're not talented—but because there's no room for them, and worse than that, there's nowhere they can find exposure. Their own good talent may die of mourning, just for want of having somebody read what they've written. I don't presume to say how we can best provide platforms for new writers to get read. I don't know. But therein lies the major problem. I suppose it's very much like actors and actresses who trod pavements and get doors slammed in their faces. Well, the writer's no different. When he's rejected, that paper is rejected, in a sense, a sizeable fragment of the writer is rejected as well. It's a piece of himself that's being turned down. And how often can this happen before suddenly you begin to question your own worth and your own value? And even worse, fundamentally, your own talent?

Breville: Then you don't think a writer can separate who he is from what he writes?

Serling: He can write completely different things from his own character, but it's nonetheless his creation, so an extension of his mind. You know, he can write about the Foreign Legion without ever having been in the Foreign Legion, but that doesn't necessarily mean that what he's written doesn't necessarily reflect the nature of him as an individual—or her. Using the male gender because it's me speaking. I don't mean to put down the female.

Breville: We hear a lot about network executives having business sense and little creative tastes. What has been your experience with network decision-makers?

Serling: I can't generalize. It depends on the individual. I've met some very literate, very imaginative men who are network executives. I've also met dullards and dolts and clods

who are just barely literate and who may understand a ledger but know nothing about professional writing. It depends on the individual, but you can't generalize. There are good and there are bad.

Breville: Most of us can usually find what's wrong with television and find much to criticize. On the other hand, what would you say are television's good points?

Serling: Well, first of all, most of it's very polished, professional. The performances are quite good, usually, even obscure little series do pretty damn good.

Breville: Do you envision a particular kind of tv audience when you write?

Serling: I don't. I choose to think of them as nameless, formless, faceless people who are all like me. And anything that I write, if I like it, they'll like it. I don't categorize them. I don't suggest that they're idiots with negative I.Q.'s or that they're massive intellectuals. I just think they are quote "an audience," like any audience. There are astute, thoughtful, sensitive people amongst them, and then there are assholes who couldn't understand anything no matter what you said.

Breville: What, then, does the television industry need most?

Serling: People in positions of decision with guts and courage and a respect for other people's creativity and less timorousness about what they assume is going to be popular. If all three networks on their own decided "Oh, what the hell, we won't follow what is the current rage, we won't stick on private eyes because they happen to be successful. Some guy comes in with a marvelously brilliant notion of a contemporary piece, let's try it, let's see what happens." I remember when George Scott did *East Side, West Side*—that was twenty-six weeks of the finest half-hour drama ever done. Little half-hour street stuff, and it was brilliant. That died of wanting. Where is it?

Breville: How about some "fun questions" now?

Serling: Sure.

(I reeled off a series of what I called "fun questions," which Serling was perfectly willing to answer off the top of his head.)

The supernatural was a recurring theme in Serling's work, so it wasn't too unusual that I should choose a series of questions revolving around death, the unknown, and worlds beyond. Looking back, I find our concentration on these areas peculiar so short a time before the writer's own death.)

Breville: If you're reincarnated, what will your next life be?

Serling: I don't believe in reincarnation. That's a cop-out, I know. I don't really want to be reincarnated. I think one time around ... I think Willa Cather did a short story called "Paul's Case," and in it, when he finally commits suicide, it says, "He surrendered to the black design of things." And that's what I anticipate death will be: a totally unconscious void in which you float through eternity with no particular consciousness of anything. I think once around is enough. I don't want to start it all over again. She said, "What happens now if I come out as Louis XIV's donkey or something?" Or I come out as a rose? You know, in my case, with my kind of luck, I'll have rose bugs and things eating my leaves!

I suppose if I had it to do over again, I'd like it to be just as it's been. And to be able to make the decisions sometimes better than they've been made. That kind of thing.

Breville: If you could live in another time, another era, what period would that be?

Serling: That's a good one. Well, if I had the means, I think I would like to be in Victorian times. Small town. Bandstands. Summer. That kind of thing. Without disease.

Breville: When life was simpler?

Serling: Much. I think that's what I would crave, a simpler form of existence. When you walked to a store and sat on the front porch. That's what I think I would like to do: rock the rest of my life. I don't mean "rattle and roll." I mean ... you know ... creak-rock. (He stubs out his cigarette.) I've failed. This was the acid test. The first time I've sat down since I've given up smoking or cut down when I was in a situation where

it called for smoking, and I succumb. Weak, weak man.

Breville: Is that a habit you have trouble giving up?

Serling: Oh, God. Jesus, would I love to give it up! I've been very good the last seven days, smoking less than half a pack a day and there was three in ... in an hour. That's very bad. Very bad, Linda. I knew you were a destructive, negative force the minute you sat down! (Laughs)

Breville: What, these days, has given you the most pleasure?

Serling: (Laughing) I refuse to answer that! Getting this last screenplay assignment has been very pleasurable for me because it's brought back certain self-faith that I—that had started to chip away a little bit. Personally, my daughter's wedding gave me a tremendous pleasure. I

"Because I'm a Western-cultured man who subscribes to the ancient saw that men do not cry, I don't cry either. I think before I die, just for the hell of it, one night I'll spend an entire night weeping, and I'll draw up a list of things that will motivate it."

have a daughter who is about your age.

Breville: Jodi?

Serling: Jodi, Jodi! How'd you know that?

Breville: I read up on you.

Serling: Ah. And the wedding was a radiant event and I enjoyed it. I was afraid I'd cry.

Breville: Did you?

Serling: I'm giving to crying at odd times, and I was very much afraid of the emotionalism of that moment, but I didn't even come close to crying. Now that I've met her husband, I'm ... (laughs) No. Very nice boy, I was just kidding.

Breville: When's the last time you cried?

Serling: Oh, Jeez, I don't remember.

Breville: Do you cry often?

Serling: Infrequently. But the urge is there.

Breville: The urge is there?

Serling: Frequently. But because I'm a Western-cultured man who subscribes to the ancient saw that men do not cry, I don't cry either. I'll go to a movie, for example, and not infrequently something triggers the

urge to weep, but I don't allow myself. I think before I die, just for the hell of it, one night I'll spend an entire night weeping, and I'll draw up a list of things that will motivate it. I'm now weeping for the following reasons: chronologically, for all the shit that's out there that I should have wept at and didn't.

Breville: Ray Bradbury said—

Serling: I'm afraid of what he said.

Breville: He said, "All through history in every culture we've had to make up mythology to explain death to ourselves and to explain life to ourselves." Do you have any thoughts on that?

Serling: Very provocative statement. That may be, but now death is with us in such abundance and hovers over us in so massive a form that we don't have time to invent a mythology, nor

is our creativity directed toward same. Now it's to prevent death. It matters not one whit what form it takes—whether it's an old man with a scythe or a pale rider on a horse or what it is. Now it's become so omniscient and so constant that our major battle is warding it off. (Long pause) I yield to no man in my respect for Ray Bradbury, however.

Breville: What do you like for people to say about your writing?

Serling: Well, I guess I like for people to enjoy it.

Breville: And what do you want them to say about the writer Rod Serling a hundred years from now?

Serling: I don't care. I just want them to remember me a hundred years from now. I don't care that they're not able to quote any single line that I've written. But just that they can say, "Oh, he was a writer." That's sufficiently an honored position for me.

Breville: Then that's what it all boils down to really?

Serling: I guess we all have a little vaunting itch for immortality, I guess that must be it. **E**



I'll Be Seeing You

by W. G. Norris

—THE PAST WAS ALMOST CLOSE ENOUGH TO TOUCH,
HIDDEN FROM HIM BY THE THICKNESS OF A SHEET OF PAPER.

Frank Crawford returned to the house one week after the funeral of his wife. They had been a devoted, though childless, couple, and the shock of his wife's sudden death numbed him so that he stalked through the funeral preparations and the interment like a stiff-legged drunk. He turned down several offers to "visit us for a few days until you feel better," and also decided against returning immediately to their small suburban home. He chose, instead, a quiet week in a downtown Boston hotel. At first, Frank was tempted to sleep the sound, withdrawn sleep of the fugitive from life. He was intelligent enough to realize what he was doing, however, so he roused himself late in the second day. He forced himself to take early and late walks through the Common. He maintained the habit of three meals a day, got a haircut, and had a drink or two before dinner, as if to show the imp of the bottle

that he wasn't going to seek solace there. He visited his bank and went over his finances with Fred Colby. Some of Edith's holdings he converted to cash and had it sent to her niece in Colorado. For some time Edith had been helping the girl through college. It seemed proper to continue with the help. Edith would have done so. He sent the sum to the girl with a note saying that it was Edith's bequest. He asked Fred to take care of the funeral expenses. The insurance covered it amply, since the service had been extremely modest. This was another of Edith's wishes. Lastly, he amended his will. He was uncertain at first about the beneficiary. He had no family, and Edith had only the niece. He decided to leave a large sum to the national fund collectors who used the money to combat the disease that had killed Edith. The rest—and it was a considerable amount, he noted—he decided to leave to Edith's niece. His



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affairs in order, he returned to his hotel, collected his laundry, packed his bag, checked out, and returned to his now empty home. With the practical outlook of the engineer he was, Frank Crawford decided to have Mrs. Kielly, the housekeeper, stay on and prepare his meals. He'd live in the house even though it might seem empty at times. Frank Crawford stepped back into the land of the living.

When he arrived home, he saw that Mrs. Kielly had preceded him. The collection of the week's newspapers was folded neatly on the coffee table in the living room. Mrs. Kielly was fumbling noisily in the kitchen, and he knew he was expected to go there and make his decisions known. He did, and Mrs. Kielly was pleased that he was staying in the house and happier to be able to serve him. She started to cry, and Frank returned to the living room and looked through the papers. He was a crossword puzzle man, and he had missed his comfortable chair and the evening puzzle. He went quickly through the papers, extracting the funny page with its checkered crossword puzzle form. He had kept up with the news in the hotel, so he saved only the pages with the comics, methodically putting them in chronological order. He had worked quickly and quietly through the first three puzzles by the time Mrs. Kielly announced that dinner was ready. He ate a silent meal, noting that silent meals would be difficult at first. He left the table and went back to the puzzles. He was absorbed in his world of "Peruvian coin," "sea eagle," and "bitter vetch," so that he answered mechanically when Mrs. Kielly announced her departure. The phone rang and startled him. He answered, and it was a wrong number. When he returned to his chair, he bent to pick up his folded page of newspaper, which lay on the seat puzzle-side down. As he reached for the paper, he noticed a new comic feature in the large square next to the puzzle. He rarely did more than scan the comics each day. He noticed that this new item was called "Little Eddie," and he recalled that Edith had mentioned it before her death. She enjoyed the comic strips. He remembered her giggling and often laughing loudly at the antics of the characters in this new cartoon. He looked at the cartoon more carefully. It was not a series of boxes, but rather one large square covering about the same space as the crossword puzzle. The way in which Frank had folded his paper had resulted in all of the week's "Little Eddie" strips being open to view. Frank's eyes watered, and he was a bit tired. He turned his attention to "Little Eddie," wondering if he would see what gave Edith so much enjoyment.

The first one he glanced at was disappointing, at least to a confirmed non-follower of the funny strips. It showed a group of figures, partly animal and yet humanized to a recognizable degree. They had just

pulled a practical joke on one of the other characters, who sulked and dripped water as he stood near the bottom right-hand part of the box. It was an old situation which Frank recognized from several earlier funny strips. He turned to number two. Here again the same trite situation, stock poses, and caption.

He was about to toss them all on the couch when he saw number three. There was something arresting about this drawing. For one thing, the characters were more clearly delineated. The fingers, whether arched or stiffened, were lifelike, the stance of the little creature in the foreground was calculated to add to the sympathy that had been generated on its behalf. The faces were more fully developed, and the background had a touch of familiarity about it. As he stared at the little scene, he knew why it was familiar: it was a faithful reproduction of the ice-skating area near Loon Lake, where he had skated as a boy. He stared for some time at the scene, and thought with nostalgia of the good times he had spent there. It seemed as though he were back there standing on the bank; he could smell the smoke from the bonfire which the boys kept burning. He heard the scraping noise of the skates on the hard ice, and he heard the crowd of youngsters on the far side of the pond yelling as they played hockey with magazines tied around their shins and taped hockey sticks with blades long since broken. He heard the whistle from the Stanton Factory, and the noise from the skaters—all unseen but existing somewhere to the right of the comic picture, somewhere under the crossword puzzle—the noise from the skaters changed as they glided to the bank to take off skates and head for home, obeying Stanton's whistle.

Crawford put down the newspaper with pleasant amazement. He had enjoyed the reminiscence of those days back at Loon Lake. Of course, in his present condition his mind certainly was in a position to run riot, and it had done so. He stood and yawned and laughed to himself. The sounds from the lake had been so lifelike. He even imagined he heard his brother, Peter, who died in the Pacific in 1943. Peter had been an expert skater. He and Frank had spent many frigid afternoons on the lake. It had been some time since Frank had thought of him.

He looked through the remaining "Little Eddies." Of the three remaining, only one had that particular attention to detail, that sense of completeness which the lake episode had. He threw away the two banal episodes and looked carefully at the remaining box. In an instant he knew the location. Pemaquid Beach. And yet there was little to suggest Pemaquid Point, its crescent beach nestled under the sharp bluff. The bluff was high and steep with an unruly hairline of crabgrass always in need of a trim. Perched at the far

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end of the rocky strip that ran out into the ocean was the whitewashed, blue-trimmed Pemaquid Lighthouse. Frank rubbed his eyes and looked again at Little Eddie and his playmates. Their eyes gleamed and their bodies swayed ever so slightly. Like children playing "Statue," they looked as though they were holding their breath and having difficulty remaining motionless. The beach sounds poured from the unseen area to the right, beyond the right border and somewhere underneath the crossword puzzle. He recognized the *shshsh* as the big breakers came ashore. He heard the girls laughing, and their laughter sounded like the wind blowing through a roomful of crystal mobiles. He heard his dog, Troop, bark as the young couples struggled in the foaming, knee-deep water, the age-old wrestle at the water's edge. He smelled the sea and the salt and the smoke from the beach fire, creosoted wood, sun-dried tinder and water-soaked logs that gave forth thick black smoke. He knew which weekend it was. It was in July 1939, the year he married Edith. They had gone to Pemaquid with Peter and his girl and two other couples. Somewhere from beyond the right-hand border of "Little Eddie" he heard Edith's young voice screaming in mock terror, and he knew that beyond that thin black border he was a young man again with Edith in his arms, and he was carrying her to deep water where he ducked her. When she came sputtering to the surface she made all the group-expected grimaces and threats, and when the crowd lost interest in them, she said, "I love you, Frank." They swam away from the beach together in long, powerful strokes. They floated in the deep water alone, and Frank remembered thinking then that he would never be happier than he was at that moment. Longing filled him as he refocused on Eddie and his idiotic friends. Their eyes glittered and their lips were gently twisted into half-smiles. The noises had subsided. The hushing noise of the breakers continued, and there was the plaintive *kree* of an occasional gull, but the crowd had moved away from the beach. Eddie and his pals capered on the grass and sand atop the bluff. It looked so real that Frank put forth his

finger. To his amazement it sank up to the second joint in the warm sand. As though burned, he pulled his hand back.

"What am I doing to myself?" he said, half aloud. He looked at his finger, but there was no sign of sand. He jabbed the paper again, but his finger went completely through, leaving a rough V-tear in the center of the comic. He glanced at Eddie and his pals, and their smiles had broadened. As an electrical engineer with a great deal of experience in computers, he had an expert's appreciation of the intricacies of the human brain. He realized how his own had led him into the borderland of fantasy. He gathered the papers and stuffed them into the wastebasket, turned off the lights, and went upstairs to bed.

Frank returned to his office the next morning. He was a senior member of his engineering firm, so he had the privacy of his own office. His secretary, an elderly second-generation Boston Irishwoman from Dorchester, greeted him heartily. A trifle too noisily, Frank thought, yet he knew that it was strange and difficult to deal with someone who has just dealt with death at close hand.

He spent the earlier part of his day catching up with correspondence. The secretary had made a list of those who had sent cards and flowers for Edith. He glanced through it hastily. He instructed the woman to get him a supply of cards and envelopes, because he intended to express his thanks to each of them personally. When his ten-thirty coffee was brought in, he relaxed and sat back. The incident with "Little Eddie" was fresh in his mind. He wouldn't tell Dr. Cronin about it, of course. But he did feel the hot sand, and whether it was a trick that his mind was playing on him or what, he had felt sand. There was the matter of the different styles of cartooning in the strips. The only two which had evoked nostalgia were obviously not drawn by the same person who had drawn the others. He pressed a buzzer on his desk.

"Yes, Mr. Crawford?" came the voice of his secretary through the intercom.

"Get me Neil Harris at the *Globe*, please."

"Yes, sir."

Neil was an old friend, a colleague through school, and now a senior man at the *Globe*. He would have some professional information about "Little Eddie" and the man who drew it.

"Mr. Harris on the line, Mr. Crawford."

Frank picked up the phone.

"Good morning, Neil, Frank here. How's everything?"

"Fine, Frank," Harris replied. He knew of Edith's death, had helped over the shock of the first day, and had been one of the friends who offered his

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home to Frank after the burial. "Back to work yet?"

"Came in this morning. Back on my feet pretty much now, and seemed to be no real reason to keep loafing. Decided to keep the house going. Mrs. Kielly has agreed to take care of meals, so life is orderly once more."

"Damned glad to hear it. You'll be all right."

"Oh, I'm sure of it. I'm not a kid. Well, I wanted to say thanks for the help you gave me, too ..."

Harris interrupted. "Enough of that stuff. I consider it the help of one friend to another, and you'll get me sore or embarrassed or both if you say any more about it. Okay?"

Frank laughed. "All right. But there's something else. Before I mention it I want you to let me finish, because I don't want you to think I'm cracking up. I want some information about a cartoonist."

"I'm glad you warned me. A cartoonist? Which one?"

"The one who draws 'Little Eddie' for your paper. Do you know the one I mean?"

"Yes, I do. It's not funny, and it's lousy artwork, and the ideas are not new by a long shot, but somehow it has caught on with the readers. It's done by a Boston man and has a fair chance of being picked up by one of the big syndicates. I know Ladler, the cartoonist. What's up?"

"I don't know exactly. I read the damned thing for the first time last night when my eyes got burny from too much crossword puzzle. Seemed to me that there were several different styles of cartooning in the series. Some of them seemed ... different."

"Funnies are not in my area, Frank, but I'll ask around and see if only Ladler draws them. But suppose there are two artists, what then? Are you turning art critic in your senile years?"

"Just curiosity, Neil, and if it happens that fifteen people draw the comic I don't know what difference it does make. But I'm curious, and there's no other explanation."

"I'll check," Neil said warmly. "Call you back."

At eleven-thirty Harris called back. He and Ladler, the cartoonist, were free for lunch, and if Frank could join them he could get all the information he wanted concerning Little Eddie, his pals, and his creator. Frank was free. They agreed to meet at Murdoch's, in the bar.

Neil Harris and a tall, thin man who was Ladler were waiting when Frank arrived. Frank and Neil shook hands heartily, then made the introductions. Small talk accompanied the pre-lunch martini. Frank waited until they had

finished their meal before he brought the conversation around to "Little Eddie."

"Now that we're all sitting here, Mr. Ladler, I really don't know why I'm so interested in your work. Perhaps the first place to start is to ask, if it isn't bad form, whether you do draw all the boxes by yourself, or does someone help you?"

Ladler smiled and knocked the tip of ash from his cigar.

"I can see you're not a dedicated 'Little Eddie' fan, Mr. Crawford, because you're supposed to be so absorbed in the situation that you ignore the artwork ..."

"No criticism intended," Frank interrupted.

"And none taken." Ladler was friendly and smiling as he continued. "I have no illusions about my skill as an artist. I gave those up some years ago. Now I support a wife and two children as a cartoonist. For years I've lived on the edge of success. Had some cartoons accepted by the biggest magazines. Then I had a long talk with the *Globe's* Al Jensen. Know him?"

"No."

"Jensen ran through some of my first 'Little Eddie' blocks and offered me a chance to provide a daily episode. I grabbed the opportunity. Only catch was that he insisted on forty-five boxes, and he wanted them right away. I had about ten prepared, had the ideas for the rest. So I went over to the art school on Lincoln Street, hired myself some struggling artists, and had the rest of them drawn to my specs."

"So there were more than two artists involved."

"Actually, not counting myself, there were five. And I'll keep four of them on a retaining basis if the syndicate picks up 'Eddie.'"

"This is standard practice, Frank," Neil offered. "I talked with Jensen after you called this morning. From what he tells me, the hard work goes into the creation of a new idea. There are millions of schoolkids who can draw Pogo or Little Abner, but the creative work involved in developing new formats is what the syndicates buy. It's quite ethical for Mr. Ladler to farm out work this way. All the big boys in cartooning do it."

"I see. Well, I never meant to suggest for a minute that it was anything but respectable. It was the two different art styles that intrigued me."

"Exactly, Mr. Crawford," said Ladler, "and that's why I'm only keeping four of the five who helped me out. I was in a spot with Jensen's insistence on forty-five blocks. Most of the young artists could duplicate my simple characters, but one of them just didn't follow instructions exactly. He turned out the arty jobs you mentioned. His work has no place in a kid's comic like 'Little Eddie,' but I



needed the ten or so he furnished, so I paid him off. But I'll not use him again."

Frank showed new interest in this information. "You bought ten from him? I've only seen two. Will there be eight more by him in future papers?"

"No. Actually, only two more. I submitted his ten to please Jensen, but as soon as my own time schedule allowed, I turned out replacement blocks for his work. I've yanked his stuff and destroyed them ... but let me see ..."

Ladler took a small notebook from his pocket and ran through a few pages.

He looked at Frank and said, "Today and tomorrow are the last of the arty 'Little Eddies.' In two days we return to simple cartooning and leave the art to someone else."

Ladler relaxed and drank his coffee. Frank was silent. Neil watched both men. He said, "A complete and honest account, Frank. Any other questions while you're investigating the cartooning business?"

Frank laughed.

"No. But how about the arty cartoonist? The lad who drew the ones you rejected. Is he still at the school on Lincoln?"

Ladler finished his coffee.

"In the first place, he's no lad, but a fairly elderly gent to be taking art lessons. But you know artists. Second, he's taken the money I gave him for his ten 'Little Eddies' and vanished. Gone. Probably drinking cheap wine someplace in the North End. Answer all your questions, Frank?"

"Yes, and thank you, Mr. Ladler. I had no intention of prying into your professional secrets and hope you'll accept an apology if I've done so."

"Cartooning is my life, Mr. Crawford, and I grind them out to make a living. The *Globe* gave me my first real break, and if I can repay them by talking 'Little Eddie' to one of Mr. Harris's friends, then I'm damned happy to do so. I've got to run along. If there's nothing more, I'll say goodbye."

The three shook hands and Ladler left. There was silence for a minute or so afterward. Then Neil

said, "What's with this sudden interest in the funnies, Frank?"

Frank looked up and smiled.

"Just curiosity. Just curiosity and that's all."

Neil paid the bill when Frank declined a brandy. On the sidewalk outside the restaurant the two men parted. Neil took a cab back to the *Globe* offices and Frank walked to the corner, bought a copy of the day's *Globe*, and took a taxi home.

Mrs. Kielly was working when he arrived. She was surprised to see him and said so. Crawford said that he still felt both tired and touchy and that half a day was all he could take. Mrs. Kielly's presence in the living room, whining vacuum cleaner motor and hot body odor, made it impossible to attend to the paper. He read all the news, glanced at the market figures. He carefully folded the funny page so that he could work on his crossword puzzle without looking at "Little Eddie." He did the puzzle more from reflex than any directed thought. He left Mrs. Kielly's noise and odor and went upstairs. In his bedroom he took some sleeping tablets which Dr. Cronin had given him. From his bedside he called the office and announced that he was taking the rest of the day off. He went into the bathroom, drew some water, and swallowed his pills. He would concentrate on "Little Eddie" when he awoke that evening.

It was dark when he awoke. He rose and washed. He went down to the dining room and ate a silent meal. He waited until Mrs. Kielly yelled her goodnight from the kitchen door before he picked up his paper. He looked immediately at "Little Eddie." The same small creatures pranced and postured in the block. Their diamond eyes glittered and their smiles taunted him. He looked into the background. It wasn't until the sounds and scents seeped through from beyond the right-hand border that he recognized the scene. It was the first house which he and Edith had rented. A large, farmy place in Quincy with wild grass, cherry and apple trees, frogs, rabbits, and a multitude of birds. It was evening and summer. The frogs were peeping; several crickets were clicking, unaware of each other's rhythms. Often Edith would make popcorn, and this was one of those nights, because he could smell popped corn and cooking oil. There was sweet grass to smell, too, and he recognized the scent of the toilet water which was Edith's favorite. He knew she was sitting just beyond the picture on the rough wood bench he had built for her. The longing welled up in him, and the loneliness of his present situation pressed against him like a wet and suffocating weight. He remembered from his earlier encounters with "Little Eddie" at Loon Lake and at the beach at Pemaquid that soon the sounds would diminish in intensity and variety, the scents would disappear,

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and he'd be left with silence and those grinning, idiotic cartoon characters. In a flash he ran his hand along the cartoon, and it sank into the hot and muggy Quincy night. His hand went beyond the picture, behind the limits of the right-hand border. His heart raced as he felt the rough arm of the chair, and he tingled as he encountered a delicate hand, a wrist, and a heavy metal bracelet. He pulled away with the recognition that he had actually touched Edith. When he tried to put his hand back into the Quincy night, it tore clumsily through the paper. He tried again and again, but he succeeded only in tearing the paper, "Little Eddie" and all, into shreds. He dropped the paper and recalled the experience. There was no doubt that he had touched Edith. He recognized the smells, and he knew that in those days she almost always wore the heavy silver bracelet he had bought on their trip to Mexico. He was sure, too, that it was more than just a trick of the mind. He was a rational man. He was sane, sober, and reliable. He could trust his senses, and he knew he had touched Edith. But, he thought with a start, there was only one more "Little Eddie" strip that could reunite him with Edith, and it would be a full day before he could get a copy of it. It would be his secret, and he wouldn't share it with Dr. Cronin, Neil, or Mrs. Kielly. They wouldn't understand. The need for keeping his own counsel calmed him. He straightened out the paper, picked up some of the torn shreds from the rug, and put them in the wastepaper basket. He went upstairs, took two more sleeping pills and went to bed.

He was on time for work the next morning. His secretary watched him with less attention than she had on the previous day. Work went well. He managed to put "Little Eddie" from his mind, and he concentrated on his correspondence. At eleven, Dr. Cronin called and suggested lunch. He agreed, and the two had a lazy lunch at Cronin's club. Frank knew that Neil had probably called the doctor last night about the lunch with Lader. Cronin was skirting around the subject, and Frank mentioned that he'd had lunch with Neil and the creator of "Little Eddie." Frank's open approach disarmed the doctor, as he knew it would. There was no more probing into motives, and Frank could see that Cronin gave him a clean bill of mental health. Frank returned to the office after lunch and finished his day's work. He took the envelopes, notepaper, and list from his secretary and promised her gravely that he would do the thank-you's himself at home that night. He left the office and headed home. At the newsstand in Park Square Station, he purchased his *Globe*. He glanced through the news and studiously avoided the comic page. He read the sports news, glanced at the market quotations, then

folded the paper and rode the rest of the way home, lost in his thoughts.

He waited impatiently as Mrs. Kielly washed the dishes from the evening meal. It was a temptation to say, "Leave those till morning, Mrs. Kielly," or simply "Please go home now, Mrs. Kielly," but he restrained himself because she had Dr. Cronin's number and would most certainly call him if Frank acted other than normally. After an eternity of clinking dishes and silverware and banging pots and pans, she said, "Goodnight." He said goodnight to her, and when she was gone he went into the kitchen to be sure that he was alone. He locked the back door and returned to the living room. He locked the front door and took the telephone from its hook. If Frank discovered that Little Eddie and his pals recreated a scene from his past with Edith, he had decided to make every attempt to see what lay in that world beyond the black border and under the crossword puzzle. What his hands could feel, his eyes could see. Frank was not bothered with "why" or even "how." He had seen complex electrical circuits act in a manner which defied earthbound logic. He was an engineer. He observed. Reported. Accepted.

He turned to Little Eddie, who was waiting with all his pals. The scene was somewhat familiar, even at first glance. First came the noises, low and scarcely audible. The heavy airliner droning through the skies. Street noise and car doors shutting. The subdued sound of people trying to communicate with each other but unwilling to make too much noise and thus reduced to whispers and mutters. He heard the faint music carried on the wind—organ, deep and melancholy, and the intrusion, briefly, of rock and roll as a car went by rapidly with its windows down and the volume on its radio up. There was the scent of flowers, cloying rose, peppery carnation, and the jumbled collective smell of flowers in bunches. There was the deep roar of the last car to arrive, and the squeak of rollers. He heard shuffling feet, and he didn't need finger-touch or eye-see to identify the situation.

He dropped the paper on the floor and stood up in the silence of the house. He went into the kitchen and unlocked the back door. He stepped out onto the back porch and breathed deeply of the clean night air. He returned to the living room and replaced the phone. He looked at his watch and saw that it was too early to go to bed. He picked up the paper, ignoring Eddie and his capering, idiotic friends. He gave his entire attention to the crossword puzzle. When he was finished, he climbed the stairs and went to bed. As he waited impatiently for sleep to come, he thought angrily that he didn't need a pin-headed idiot like Little Eddie or any of his pin-headed friends to remind him of what it was like on the day of Edith's funeral. **□**



The River Styx Runs Upstream

by Dan Simmons

IT WAS GOOD TO HAVE MOTHER HOME AGAIN, AT FIRST.
YOU COULD ALMOST MAKE BELIEVE SHE WASN'T DEAD.

*What thou lovest well remains
the rest is dross
What thou lov'st well shall not be reft
from thee
What thou lov'st well is thy
true heritage ...*

—Ezra Pound
Canto LXXXI

I loved my mother very much. After her funeral, after the coffin was lowered, the family went home and waited for her return.

I was only eight at the time. Of the required ceremony I remember little. I recall that the collar of the previous year's shirt was far too tight and that the unaccustomed tie was like a noose around my neck. I remember that the June day was too beautiful for such a solemn gathering. I remember Uncle Will's heavy drinking that morning and the bottle of Jack Daniels he pulled out as we drove home from the funeral. I remember my father's face.

The afternoon was too long. I had no role to play in the family's gathering that day, and the adults ignored me. I found myself wandering from room to room with a warm glass of Kool-Aid, until finally I escaped to the backyard. Even that familiar landscape of play and seclusion was ruined by the glimpse of pale, fat faces staring out from the neighbor's windows. They were waiting. Hoping for a glimpse. I felt like shouting, throwing rocks at them. Instead I sat down on the old tractor tire we used as a sandbox. Very deliberately I poured the red Kool-Aid into the sand and watched the spreading stain digging a small pit.

They're digging her up now.

I ran to the swing set and angrily began to pump my legs against the bare soil. The swing creaked with rust, and one leg of the frame rose out of the ground.

No, they've already done that, stupid. Now they're hooking her up to big machines. Will they pump the blood back into her?

I thought of bottles hanging. I remembered the fat, red ticks that clung to our dog in the summer.



Angry, I swung high, kicking up hard even when there was no more height to be gained.

Do her fingers twitch first? Or do her eyes just slide open like an owl waking up?

I reached the high point of my arc and jumped. For a second I was weightless and I hung above the earth like Superman, like a spirit flying from its body. Then gravity claimed me and I fell heavily on my hands and knees. I had scraped my palms and put grass stain on my right knee. Mother would be angry.

She's being walked around now. Maybe they're dressing her like one of the mannikins in Mr. Feldman's store window.

My brother Simon came out to the backyard. Although he was only two years older, Simon looked like an adult to me that afternoon. An old adult. His blond hair, as recently cut as mine, hung down in limp bangs across a pale forehead. His eyes looked tired. Simon almost never yelled at me. But he did that day.

"Get in here. It's almost time."

I followed him through the back porch. Most of the relatives had left, but from the living room we could hear Uncle Will. He was shouting. We paused in the hallway to listen.

"For Chrissakes, Les, there's still time. You just can't do this."

"It's already done."

"Think of the ... Jesus Christ ... think of the kids."

We could hear the slur of the voice and knew that Uncle Will had been drinking more. Simon put his finger to his lips. There was a silence.

"Les, think about just the money side of it. What's ... how much ... it's twenty-five percent of everything you have. For how many years, Les? Think of the kids. What'll that do to—"

"It's done, Will."

We had never heard that tone from Father before. It was not argumentative—the way it was when he and Uncle Will used to argue politics late at

The River Styx

night. It was not sad like the time he talked to Simon and me after he had brought Mother home from the hospital the first time. It was just final.

There was more talk. Uncle Will started shouting. Even the silences were angry. We went to the kitchen to get a Coke. When we came back down the hallway, Uncle Will almost ran over us in his rush to leave. The door slammed behind him. He never entered our home again.

They brought Mother home just after dark. Simon and I were looking out the picture window and we could feel the neighbors watching. Only Aunt Helen and a few of our closest relatives had stayed. I felt Father's surprise when he saw the car. I don't know what we'd been expecting—maybe a long black hearse like the one that had carried Mother to the cemetery that morning.

They drove up in a yellow Toyota. There were four men in the car with Mother. Instead of dark suits like the one Father was wearing, they had on pastel, short-sleeved shirts. One of the men got out of the car and offered his hand to Mother.

I wanted to rush to the door and down the sidewalk to her, but Simon grabbed my wrist and we stood back in the hallway while Father and the other grownups opened the door.

They came up the sidewalk in the glow of the gaslight on the lawn. Mother was between the two men, but they were not really helping her walk, just guiding her a little. She wore the light blue dress she had bought at Scott's just before she got sick. I had expected her to look all pale and waxy—like when I peeked through the crack in the bedroom door before the men from the funeral home came to take her body away—but her face was flushed and healthy, almost sunburned.

When they stepped onto the front stoop, I could see that she was wearing a lot of makeup. Mother never wore makeup. The two men also had pink cheeks. All three of them had the same smile.

When they came into the house, I think we all took a step back—except for Father. He put his hands on Mother's arms, looked at her a long time, and kissed her on the cheek. I don't think she kissed him back. Her smile did not change. Tears were running down Father's face. I felt embarrassed.

The Resurrectionists were saying something. Father and Aunt Helen nodded. Mother just stood there, still smiling slightly, and looked politely at the yellow-shirted man as he spoke and joked and patted Father on the back. Then it was our turn to hug Mother. Aunt Helen moved Simon forward, and I was still hanging onto Simon's hand. He kissed her on the cheek and quickly moved back to Father's side. I threw my arms around her neck and kissed her on the lips. I had *missed* her.

Her skin wasn't cold. It was just *different*. She was looking right at me. Baxter, our German shepherd, began to whine and scratch at the back door.

Father took the Resurrectionists into the study. We heard snatches of conversation down the hall.

"... if you think of it as a stroke ..."

"How long will she ..."

"You understand the tithing is necessary because of the expenses of monthly care and ..."

The women relatives stood in a circle around Mother. There was an awkward moment until they realized that Mother did not speak. Aunt Helen reached her hand out and touched her sister's cheek. Mother smiled and smiled.

Then Father was back and his voice was loud and hearty. He explained how similar it was to a light stroke—did we remember Uncle Richard? Meanwhile, Father kissed people repeatedly and thanked everyone.

The Resurrectionists left with smiles and signed papers. The remaining relatives began to leave soon after that. Father saw them down the walk, smiling and shaking their hands.

"Think of it as though she's been ill but has recovered," said Father. "Think of her as home from the hospital."

Aunt Helen was the last to leave. She sat next to Mother for a long time, speaking softly and searching Mother's face for a response. After a while Aunt Helen began to cry.

"Think of it as if she's recovered from an illness," said Father as he walked her to her car. "Think of her as home from the hospital."

Aunt Helen nodded, still crying, and left. I think she knew what Simon and I knew. Mother was not home from the hospital. She was home from the grave.

The night was long. Several times I thought I heard the soft slap of Mother's slippers on the hallway floor and my breathing stopped, waiting for the door to open. But it didn't. The moonlight lay across my legs and exposed a patch of wallpaper next to the dresser. The flower pattern looked like the face of a great, sad beast. Just before dawn, Simon leaned across from his bed and whispered, "Go to sleep, stupid." And so I did.

For the first week, Father slept with Mother in the same room where they had always slept. In the morning his face would sag and he would snape at us while we ate our cereal. Then he moved to his study and slept on the old divan in there.

The summer was very hot. No one would play

Its mouth was open slightly,
showing surprisingly large
teeth gone yellow
at the roots.

As I watched, an ant came
out of the mouth,
crossed the dark muzzle,
and walked out onto
the staring eye.

'This is what dead is,' I thought.

with us, so Simon and I played together. Father had only morning classes at the University. Mother moved around the house and watered the plants a lot. Once Simon and I saw her watering a plant that had died and been removed while she was at the hospital in April. The water ran across the top of the cabinet and dripped on the floor. Mother did not notice.

When Mother did go outside, the forest preserve behind our house seemed to draw her in. Perhaps it was the darkness. Simon and I used to enjoy playing at the edge of it after twilight, catching fireflies in a jar or building blanket tents, but after Mother began walking there, Simon spent the evenings inside or on the front lawn. I stayed back there because sometimes Mother wandered and I would take her by the arm and lead her back to the house.

Mother wore whatever Father told her to wear. Sometimes he was rushed to get to class and would say, "Wear the red dress," and Mother would spend a sweltering July day in heavy wool. She didn't sweat. Sometimes he would not tell her to come downstairs in the morning, and she would remain in the bedroom until he returned. On those days I tried to get Simon at least to go upstairs and look in on her with me; but he just stared at me and shook his head. Father was drinking more, like Uncle Will used to, and he would yell at us for nothing at all. I always cried when Father shouted; but Simon never cried anymore.

Mother never blinked. At first I didn't notice; but then I began to feel uncomfortable when I saw that she never blinked. But it didn't make me love her any less.

Neither Simon nor I could fall asleep at night. Mother used to tuck us in and tell us long stories about a magician named Yandy who took our dog, Baxter, on great adventures when we weren't play-

ing with him. Father didn't make up stories, but he used to read to us from a big book he called Pound's *Cantos*. I didn't understand most of what he read, but the words felt good and I loved the sounds of words he said were Greek. Now nobody checked in on us after our baths. I tried telling stories to Simon for a few nights, but they were no good and Simon asked me to stop.

In the Fourth of July Tommy Wiedermeier, who had been in my class the year before, drowned in the swimming pool they had just put in. That night we all sat out back and watched the fireworks above the fairgrounds half a mile away. You couldn't see the ground displays because of the forest preserve, but the skyrockets were bright and clear. First you would see the explosion of color and then, four or five seconds later it seemed, the sound would catch up. I turned to say something to Aunt Helen and saw Mother looking out from the second-story window. Her face was very white against the dark room, and the colors seemed to flow down over her like fluids.

It was not long after the Fourth that I found the dead squirrel. Simon and I had been playing Cavalry and Indians in the forest preserve. We took turns finding each other ... shooting and dying repeatedly in the weeds until it was time to start over. Only this time I was having trouble finding him. Instead, I found the clearing.

It was a hidden place, surrounded by bushes as thick as our hedge. I was still on my hands and knees from crawling under the branches when I saw the squirrel. It was large and reddish and had been dead for some time. The head had been wrenched around almost backwards on the body. Blood had dried near one ear. Its left paw was clenched, but the other lay open on a twig as if it were resting there. Something had taken one eye, but the other stared blackly at the canopy of branches. Its mouth was open slightly, showing surprisingly large teeth gone yellow at the roots. As I watched, an ant came out of the mouth, crossed the dark muzzle, and walked out onto the staring eye.

This is what dead is, I thought.

The bushes vibrated to some unfelt breeze. I was scared to be there and I left, crawling straight ahead and bashing through thick branches that grabbed at my shirt.

In the autumn I went back to Longfellow School, but soon transferred to a private school. The Resurrectionist families were discriminated against in those days. The kids made fun of us or called us names and no one played with us. No one played with us at the new school either, but they didn't call us names.

The River Styx

Our bedroom had no wall switch but an old-fashioned hanging lightbulb with a cord. To turn on the light I had to cross half the dark room and feel around in the dark room until I found the cord. Once when Simon was staying up late to do his homework, I went upstairs by myself. I was swinging my arm around in the darkness to find the string when my hand fell on Mother's face. Her teeth felt cool and slick. I pulled my hand back and stood there a minute in the dark before I found the cord and turned on the light.

"Hello, Mother," I said. I sat on the edge of the bed and looked up at her. She was staring at Simon's empty bed. I reached out and took her hand. "I miss you," I said. I said some other things, but the words got all mixed up and sounded stupid, so I just sat there, holding her hand, waiting for some returning pressure. My arm got tired, but I remained sitting there and holding her fingers in mine until Simon came up. He stopped in the doorway and stared at us. I looked down and dropped her hand. After a few minutes she went away.

Father put Baxter to sleep just before Thanksgiving. He was not an old dog, but he acted like one. He was always growling and barking, even at us; and he would never come inside anymore. After he ran away for the third time, the pound called us. Father just said, "Put him to sleep," and hung up the phone. They sent us a bill.

Father's classes had fewer and fewer students and finally he took a sabbatical to write his book on Ezra Pound. He was home all that year, but he didn't write much. Sometimes he would spend the morning down at the library, but he would be home by one o'clock and would watch tv. He would start drinking before dinner and stay in front of the television until really late. Simon and I would stay up with him sometimes; but we didn't like most of the shows.

Simon's dream started about then. He told me about it on the way to school one morning. He said the dream was always the same. When he fell asleep, he would dream that he was still awake, reading a comic book. Then he would start to set the comic on the nightstand, and it would fall on the floor. When he reached down to pick it up, Mother's arm would come out from under the bed and she would grasp his wrist with her white hand. He said her grip was very strong, and somehow he knew that she wanted him under the bed with her. He would hang onto the blankets as hard as he could, but he knew that in a few seconds the bedclothes would slip and he would fall.

He said that last night's dream had finally been a little different. This time Mother had stuck

her head out from under the bed. Simon said that it was like when a garage mechanic slides out from under a car. He said she was grinning at him, not smiling but grinning real wide. Simon said that her teeth had been filed down to points.

"Do you ever have dreams like that?" he asked. I knew he was sorry he'd told me.

"No," I said. I loved Mother.

That April the Farley twins from the next block accidentally locked themselves in an abandoned freezer and suffocated. Mrs. Hargill, our cleaning lady, found them, out behind their garage. Thomas Farley had been the only kid who still invited Simon over to his yard. Now Simon only had me.

It was just before Labor Day and the start of school that Simon made plans for us to run away. I didn't want to run away, but I loved Simon. He was my brother.

"Where are we gonna go?"

"We got to get out of here," he said. Which wasn't much of an answer.

But Simon had set aside a bunch of stuff and even picked up a city map. He'd sketched out our path through the forest preserve, across Sherman River at the Laurel Street viaduct, all the way to



Last night's dream had been a little different. Mother had stuck her head out from under the bed.

It was like when a garage mechanic slides out from under a car. She was grinning at him, not smiling but grinning real wide. Simon said that her teeth had been filed down to points.

Uncle Will's house without ever crossing any major streets.

"We can camp out," said Simon. He showed me a length of clothesline he had cut. "Uncle Will will let us be farmhands. When he goes out to his ranch next spring, we can go with him."

We left at twilight. I didn't like leaving right before it got dark, but Simon said that Father wouldn't notice we were gone until late the next morning when he woke up. I carried a small backpack filled with food Simon had sneaked out of the refrigerator. He had some stuff rolled up in a blanket and tied over his back with the piece of clothesline. It was pretty odd until we got deeper into the forest preserve. The stream made a gurgling sound like the one that came from Mother's room the night she died. The roots and branches were so thick that Simon had to keep his flashlight on all the time; and that made it seem even darker. We stopped before too long, and Simon strung his rope between two trees. I threw the blanket over it and we both scrambled around on our hands and knees to find stones.

We ate our bologna sandwiches in the dark while the creek made swallowing noises in the night. We talked a few minutes, but our voices seemed too tiny, and after a while we both fell asleep, on the cold ground with our jackets pulled over us and our heads on the nylon pack and all the forest sounds going on around us.

I woke up in the middle of the night. I was very still. Both of us had huddled down under the jackets, and Simon was snoring. The leaves had stopped stirring, the insects were gone, and even the stream had stopped making noise. The openings of the tent made two brighter triangles in the field of darkness.

I sat up with my heart pounding.

There was nothing to see when I moved my head near the opening. But I knew exactly what was

out there. I put my head under my jacket and moved away from the side of the tent.

I waited for something to touch me through the blanket. At first I thought of Mother coming after us, of Mother walking through the forest after us with sharp twigs brushing at her eyes. But it wasn't Mother.

The night was cold and heavy around our little tent. It was as black as the eye of that dead squirrel, and it wanted in. For the first time in my life I understood that the darkness did not end with the morning light. My teeth were chattering. I curled up against Simon and stole a little of his heat. His breath came soft and slow against my cheek. After a while I shook him awake and told him we were going home when the sun rose, that I wasn't going with him. He started to argue, but then he heard something in my voice, something he didn't understand, and he only shook his head tiredly and went back to sleep.

In the morning the blanket was wet with dew and our skins felt clammy. We folded things up, left the rocks lying in their rough pattern, and walked home. We did not speak.

Father was sleeping when we got home. Simon threw our stuff in the bedroom and then he went out into the sunlight. I went to the basement.

It was very dark down there, but I sat on the wooden stairs without turning on a light. There was no sound from the shadowed corners, but I knew that Mother was there.

"We ran away, but we came back," I said at last. "It was my idea to come back."

Through the narrow window slats I saw green grass. A sprinkler started up with a loud sigh. Somewhere in the neighborhood, kids were shouting. I paid attention only to the shadows.

"Simon wanted to keep going," I said, "but I made us come back. It was my idea to come home."

I sat a few more minutes but couldn't think of anything else to say. Finally I got up, brushed off my pants, and went upstairs to take a nap.

A week after Labor Day, Father insisted we go to the shore for the weekend. We left on Friday afternoon and drove straight through to Ocean City. Mother sat alone in the rear seat. Father and Aunt Helen rode up front. Simon and I were crowded into the back of the station wagon, but he refused to count cows with me or talk to me or even play with the toy planes I'd brought along.

We stayed at an ancient hotel right on the boardwalk. The other Resurrectionists in Father's Tuesday group recommended the place, but it smelled of age and rot and rats in the walls. The corridors were a faded green, the doors a darker green,

The River Styx

and only every third light worked. The halls were a dim maze, and you had to make two turns just to find the elevator. Everyone but Simon stayed inside all day Saturday, sitting in front of the laboring air conditioner and watching television. There were many more of the resurrected around now, and you could hear them shuffling through the dark halls. After sunset they went out to the beach, and we joined them.

I tried to make Mother comfortable. I set the beach towel down for her and turned her to face the sea. By this time the moon had risen and a cool breeze was blowing in. I put Mother's sweater across her shoulders. Behind us the midway splashed lights out over the boardwalk and the roller coaster rumbled and growled.

I would not have left if Father's voice hadn't irritated me so. He talked too loudly, laughed at nothing, and took deep drinks from a bottle in a brown bag. Aunt Helen said very little but watched Father sadly and tried to smile when he laughed. Mother was sitting peacefully, so I excused myself and walked up to the midway to hunt for Simon. I was lonely without him. The place was empty of families and children, but the rides were still running. Every few minutes there would be a roar and screams from the few riders as the roller coaster took its steepest plunge. I ate a hot dog and looked around, but Simon was nowhere to be found.

While walking back along the beach, I saw Father lean over and give Aunt Helen a quick kiss on the cheek. Mother had wandered away, and I quickly offered to go find her just to hide the tears of rage in my eyes. I walked up the beach past the place where the two teenagers had drowned the previous weekend. There were a few of the resurrected around. They were sitting near the water with their families; but no sight of Mother. I was thinking of heading back when I thought I noticed some movement under the boardwalk.

It was incredibly dark under there. Narrow strips of light, broken into weird sorts of patterns by the wooden posts and cross-braces, dropped down from cracks in the walkway overhead. Footsteps and rumbles from the midway sounded like fists pounding against a coffin lid. I stopped then. I had a sudden image of dozens of them being there in the darkness. Dozens, Mother among them, with thin patterns of light crossing them so that you could make out a hand or shirt or staring eye. But they were not there. Mother was not there. Something else was.

I don't know what made me look up. Footsteps from above. A slight turning, turning; something turning in the shadows. I could see where he had climbed the cross-braces, wedged a sneaker here, lifted himself there to the wide timber. It would not have been hard. We'd climbed like that a thousand

times. I stared right into his face, but it was the clothesline I recognized first.

Father quit teaching after Simon's death. He never went back after the sabbatical, and his notes for the Pound book sat stacked in the basement with last year's newspapers. The Resurrectionists helped him find a job as a custodian in a nearby shopping mall, and he usually didn't get home before two in the morning.

After Christmas I went away to a boarding school that was two states away. The Resurrectionists had opened the Institute by this time, and more and more families were turning to them. I was later able to go to the University on a full scholarship. Despite the covenant, I rarely came home during those years. Father was drunk during my few visits. Once I drank with him and we sat in the kitchen and cried together. His hair was almost gone except for a few white strands on the sides, and his eyes were sunken in a lined face. The alcohol had left innumerable broken blood vessels in his cheeks, and he looked as though he was wearing more makeup than Mother.

Mrs. Hargill called three days before graduation. Father had filled the bath with warm water and then drawn the razor blade up the vein rather than across it. He had read his Plutarch. It had been two days before the housekeeper found him, and when I arrived home the next evening the bathtub was still caked with congealed rings. After the funeral I went through all of his old papers and found a journal he had been keeping for several years. I burned it along with the stacks of notes for his unfinished book.

Our policy with the Institute was honored despite the circumstances, and that helped me through the next few years. My career is more than a job to me—I believe in what I do and I'm good at it. It was my idea to lease some of the empty school buildings for our new neighborhood centers.

Last week I was caught in a traffic jam, and when I inched the car up to the accident site and saw the small figure covered by a blanket and the broken glass everywhere, I also noticed that a crowd of them had gathered on the curb. There are so many of them these days.

I used to have shares in a condominium in one of the last lighted sections of the city, but when our old house came up for sale I jumped at the chance to buy it. I've kept many of the old furnishings and replaced others so that it's almost the way it used to be. Keeping up an old house like that is expensive, but I don't spend my money foolishly. After work a lot of guys from the Institute go out to bars, but I don't. After I've put away my equipment and scrubbed down the steel tables, I go straight home. My family is there. They're waiting for me. **■**



THE SEED

by Joseph Bocchi

IT WAS PLANTING TIME—AND THE MIDGET KNEW
THAT SALLY WAS THE MOST FERTILE GROUND OF ALL.

Sally was cooking dinner in the kitchen. Outside, little Janie was crying. She was screaming something about that midget. Kyle was in the living room watching television: a woman being chased down a San Francisco street.

"Go out there and see where the problem is," Kyle shouted in to his wife. He was not angry, just distracted.

A man shot the woman. Then a beagle came on and sang about pure beef. Kyle laughed. His thick lips shook.

"She's scared of him, Kyle," Sally was yelling back at him. "Why don't you kick him out? Tell him you don't need any more handy work done around this old house. Tell him your Aunt Bet is coming to

live and we need his room. Bury him in the garden. Something. Anything. Use your imagination for once!"

Kyle was patient. "Imagination don't pay the power bill, now does it Sally, honey? And don't you go saying neither do you, because you know I am truly trying to do my best by you and Janie."

A German shepherd and a dachshund had formed a chorus with the beagle. They gave a final howl, smiled, and bowed.

Sally slammed the iron skillet on the counter top, and hard chopped peppers somersaulted into the air. None of the boarders liked vegetables, not even her own family did, but by the end of the summer they would have learned to love them. Sally anticipated peppers, tomatoes, lettuce, beans, and cab-



bage aplenty—if those afternoon Georgia thunderstorms didn't drown her plants, or if the hail didn't crush them, or if the garden was never even planted thanks to that midget, who Sally knew to be half the man Kyle was and so did half of nothing.

The back door moaned, and Sally turned to see little Janie standing just inside the kitchen, her head bent. She kicked hard at the linoleum floor with her heel as if she were trying to free some stubborn stone in the garden, then pointed past the screen door to where the midget was scraping the reddish earth with his hands, whistling to himself. His face was hidden in the shadow of his straw panama. Sparrows pecked the ground behind him.

"What'd he tell you now, baby?" asked Sally in a whisper to reassure poor Janie. This was not the first time he had made her cry.

Janie twisted a single curl of golden hair with dirty fingers. "He tell me something about the

seed," and she sniffed and wiped a soiled, lacy sleeve beneath her nose.

"I told you to stay away from the garden when he's there. Didn't I tell you to stay away from there, Janie Lynn Gibson?"

"Yes'm."

"And now look at you. Like a little mole."

"Yes'm."

"And you know who is going to get a bath right this instant, don't you? And it's not that midget out there, is it?"

"No, mama, but he tell me about the seed. He say, 'Look Janie,' and he hold out his little fist, mama, and I was scared." With this Janie raised her hand out to her mother to demonstrate, as if seeds really were tucked away there in the palm of her hand. "But I ran, I ran hard, mama, just like you tell me when he do bad things."

"Quiet now," Sally said and shook her head at

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her poor little girl because Janie was not to blame. "But you can't be running to me and crying every time he looks cross-eyed at you, you know honey."

"But mama, what you said—"

"Never mind what mama told you. She's telling you different now, so listen up," and then Sally tried to smile as she shoed her daughter into the living room. Janie hurried to Kyle, nestled beside him on the old love couch. The lead-colored cushions sagged the more with this little added weight.

Lighting the gas burners, Sally placed the pan of peppers and an aluminum pot of water on the stove. Someone behind her said dead seriously, "Only way to remove it is from the back, around the spinal column," and Kyle answered to no one in particular, "He should have aimed for the heart, for Christ's sake." A ukulele played in the background, Mr. Waters's. Overhead, something heavy dropped. Sally listened to the scuffling of Woolly Bear slippers and, soon, the toilet flush. Mame Grady. The old woman was surely drunk again. The pipes were thundering now with water, and the air filled with cracklings and voices, as it did on Easter morning, just three weeks ago tomorrow, when Kyle told the midget he could stay in exchange for work to be done around the house.

There had not been a moment's peace since then, since that quiet hour before dawn when Sally sleepily stuffed her turkey, cleaned and chilled stalks of celery, arranged black and Spanish olives in a cut glass bowl, and ironed Janie's new lilac print dress for Mass. Later, during that banging, water-running time when everyone else hurried to be ready, Sally had sat drinking her cup of coffee, the thick steam from it mingling with the other sweet kitchen smells.

The boarders had paraded past her one by one. Mr. Waters first in his faded blue seersucker, bright green shirt, and tie the color of overripe strawberries, winking at Sally and apologetic for having to ask if everything looked "spiffy," what with his cataracts and all. Then came Chubby Philips, who was headed not for church but to his daily breakfast of scrambled eggs and Bloody Marys at Sloan's Tavern down the road. And widow Grady, finally, pacing soberly through the kitchen, barely able to hide her silver flask in that small vinyl clutch bag.

Sally's own family was assembling too: Kyle, handsome in his brown blazer, though his neck puffed and reddened at the collar where Sally had pulled his tie up tight; and Janie, with matching hat and gloves, swinging a patent leather pocket-book just like her mother's. Sally was confident the day would be warm after all and that rain was an impossibility, so she had chosen a white, sleeveless cotton dress.

They were halfway out the back door when he appeared, striding up the cobblestone path as poised

as a tightrope walker, a khaki duffel bag balanced under each arm. The midget stopped directly in front of Sally, bowed, but turned to Kyle to smile. He wore a turquoise chesterfield, mended many times. With a voice as youthful and attractive as his features, he said, "I have heard such truly good things of your gracious home and hospitality."

Janie started to cry. Loosening his tie, Kyle said to the midget, "Come on now, and we'll have Sal here fix us up a cup of hot rum coffee. That'll knock the chill from your bones."

The Gibsons never did make it to Mass. Kyle and the midget had talked for hours, right through the Easter feast. Sally was too busy to be angry, fluttering about the dining room table like a hungry, nervous bird, serving her steamy mashed potatoes, portioning out the cranberry jelly, wiping the lip of the gravy boat whenever needed. Everyone was pleased and animated. Like vapor from a coffee cup, Sally felt herself being swept into thin air and vanishing there. She hovered for a moment above the others, and the hum of voices rose to her, blending with the sound of rain that had begun to fall. She thought of flying, of swallows when they shoot the thick gray sky and seem to break beyond, and she watched the lightning branch past the cottonwoods and heard the closing thunderclaps. Then lightning struck and broke a tree nearby, and Kyle slapped his knee, shouting, "More gravy for Dr. Doorman."

No one knew whether the midget really was a doctor. No one but Kyle would ever address him as such. Sally had overheard once while he and Doorman sat on the back porch that in his youth the midget had toured the country and seven foreign lands as a professional wrestler and that his real name was Victor, Victor Fleischman. Sally was not then curious to learn more, but accidentally, some nights later, she did.

They had been in the living room, watching a wrestling match on television, Kyle, Mr. Waters, and Chubby. Sally listened from the kitchen as Kyle tried to convince the others that Dr. Doorman was a world champ once and, with a blink of his eyes, could hypnotize his opponents into pinning themselves. Old Waters said this was "bunk," and Chubby agreed. The argument did not last long. The midget suddenly was there, grinning from the staircase. With an elegant bow, he offered to demonstrate.

"It worked equally as well with the ladies who frequented my matches," he said, scanning the faces of the three men. "They would stare longingly from the very front rows, their beautiful diamond brooches twinkling from silk dresses like curious smiles." The midget's own smile had become curious then. Sally alone noticed this, for the others were doubled over with laughter.

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my matches," he said.

The water in the aluminum pot broke into a boil now, and Sally concentrated once more on her dinner. She measured out two and one-half cups of white rice. The recipe called for long-grain rice, cubed lamb and peppers, half a tablespoon of garlic (minced), a pinch of celery salt, and oregano according to your tastes. She had memorized this, her mother's favorite dish, but with money coming only from the boarders she was forced to improvise. So she emptied a package of hot dogs onto the cutting board and soon grew content with the comforting dull knock of the cleaver.

"Is that delicious dinner ready yet, Mrs. Gibson?" The midget watched her through the screen door. He fanned his trousers by the knees, and small chunks of red clay fell like pennies.

Sally pretended not to hear. In the silver screen light, silhouetted by the evening sky, the midget's head seemed large to her. But he was not a dwarf. In fact, his body was quite finely proportioned. Even Sally could agree with her husband on that point. Sometimes, on warm days such as today, the midget would wear his faded wrestling suit to dinner, and it would become obvious. Beginning at the shoulder of the dull yellow suit and disappearing somewhere between his legs was the remaining half of a brown velvet V.

"It smells simply delightful," the midget said, displaying unusually bright teeth. He constantly cleaned them, even at the dinner table, with what he claimed was a diamond-tipped stickpin. This he kept in his lapel. Sally thought the stone was glass.

The midget removed his straw hat and dabbed a linen handkerchief on his temples and graying hair. The tops of his ears were flat.

"It is all but finished," he said. "I hope you don't mind..."

Sally continued to stir the peppers, which browned slowly. She could smell the fresh earth on the midget's clothing as he entered the kitchen.

"I hope you don't mind that we did not finish your garden today. It is quite nearly so. All that remains is the carrot, and I thought you would like personally to supervise their inception. Such fascinating vegetables, wouldn't you agree? And

Kyle has told me not a little of your fondness for the fresh, firm fruits of the earth."

Sally passed the wooden spoon from the peppers to the boiling water. "Yes, I do enjoy vegetables," she said as pleasantly as could be expected. The heat from the stove and the warm spring day, that and Janie starting to whimper again because something was not quite right, all pricked at her. She thought for a moment she would scream. The hot oil continued to pop, and a high school marching band played. Cheerleaders spelled out White-N-Bright.

"I took the liberty of throwing out the bad seeds." The midget had stepped closer to Sally and stood at midkitchen to inspect his black Oxfords, which had lost their shine at the pointed toes. "Some were just too, too dry, and others... Take my advice, Mrs. Gibson: never store seeds in metal cans. Those at the bottom are doomed to rot, while those at the top, poor innocents, harden into stone, their life-giving moistures sucked from them. *Pauvre, les enfants*," and he laughed.

"Dinner will be ready soon," Sally said instinctively.

"Fine. But I was laughing only because of our little Janie. Such a sweet daughter you have, Mrs. Gibson. Why, the poor dear thing was working so hard today in the garden, hollowing out perfect tiny holes with her teaspoon to await my seeds, concentrating just like a big girl because she was intent on doing it right. Then, just now—surely you heard—she chanced upon a nightcrawler, a silk-skinned beauty. I must say, which caused no small outcry from the child. Imagine your own fright, Mrs. Gibson, touching that buried, unimaginable thing. A veritable serpent of the deep to baby Janie, I can assure you."

Sally noticed a certain rawness at the tip of her tongue, and she stepped to the sink for water. The midget was instantly there at her side, spread-legged and hands clasped thoughtfully behind his back, waiting to be of assistance. His eyes seemed to glow in that brief moment when Sally was most vulnerable, colorless or all colors, like the lip of cut glass when it catches light. His eyes had cut into Sally, and she desperately needed distance from them now. Once again she concentrated, on the browning peppers, on the perfect rice that simmered in the pot. When he next spoke, his voice more intimate, a silk-like chill swirled up the small of Sally's back and around her spine.

"It is about your husband," the midget had said. He had paused to sigh confidentially, and the room filled with a woman's soothing voice fading gently into violins. Kyle snickered something, and Sally glanced sharply toward the living room.

"Precisely," whispered the midget. "You know as well as I that this slothful habit of his is damaging

not only to himself but to you as well. You may think—and not without due cause—that his bleary-eyed addiction is detrimental simply for its having dulled his mind. However true this may be, there is still a graver aspect, much more devastatingly so, I can assure you. That is why I am glad for this chance to speak to you, to have our little tête which I must insist remain confidential since I do value your husband's friendship. You may not understand all that I am about to say—granted—but I am optimistic something will penetrate.

"Now. A-hem. As the universe is composed basically of light and dark, so too are our lives divided. The darkness is inactive, a void substance, and therefore rendered harmless. Do you follow thus far, Mrs. Gibson?"

Sally shook her head. She tried not to listen. "Good," the midget said. "Splendid, Mrs. Gibson." He drew a heavy breath, forced wrinkles near his brows. "But! But! Light, even that believed-to-be-harmless light from your husband's hobby, is a dangerous element, most dangerous. It is explosive, in fact. Yes, I like that very much. Explosive as dynamite. And what, Mrs. Gibson, what do we witness when dynamite is detonated in midair?"

Sally shrugged her shoulders.

"Exactly. Not a thing. Nada. A space is simply filled for a moment. The mountain still intact, the moss yet green. Velvety green, in truth, like the ripple of a silk dress. The day continues brightly. We watch the wind gently turn a leaf."

The midget took up a raw pepper from the counter top and held it tightly in his fist. "And what! what! dear lady, when the heart of the looming mountain is the victim of our charge, when the flicker of light is buried deep beneath its breast, a density of rock? Dust to violent dust, Mrs. Gibson. Void! That is all. No open breath of fire to emblazon your golden hair. No glow of sudden sunshine expanding like novas in your eyes. Nothing, simply. Nothing. Heat smothered in its womb."

Sally yanked at the frying pan, and a burning spray settled on her hand. She screamed. Black wrinkled peppers bobbed lifelessly in the oil. Her eyes began to tear, from the steam and the pain. She didn't know what to do first, so she screamed again—at her dinner, at the midget's advances. "Everything is ruined!"

Sally ran past Kyle and Janie, who watched with opened mouths, and up the stairs, screaming once more before she reached the safety of her bedroom. She slammed the door shut and pressed her face against it. "I want him out tonight!" Sally shouted down to Kyle. "Do you hear me? Tonight!" She blinked at the peeling brown paint. Then the squeak of steps, and Sally said, holding fast to the doorknob, "Just do as I say and leave me alone."

"You ain't going to let them good peppers go to waste, are you now honey?" Kyle asked, timid as a fat mouse, stupid as a mountain, explosive as a, as a . . . and Sally began to cry.

"I'm not coming out until he's gone. Those peppers can burn to hell, and you and the rest of them can eat paint chips as far as I'm concerned."

"Now, honey."

"Kyle!"

No sound. Sally looked through the keyhole but saw nothing.

"Honey?" Kyle's voice was soft and low. He waited.

"Honey? I'll talk to him right after dinner, I promise, and I'll straighten this whole thing out for you. There ain't no need to fuss with him right down there in the kitchen and all, and he did get your garden in for you after all, now didn't he do a good job with your garden? Splendid, I'd say. So I'll just patch things up for you. That's what I'll do. And I'll tell him we got a rule or something. No boarders in the kitchen when you're cooking. I'll use my imagination, honey, say the tiles get scuffed up, or maybe that the wax gets dingy and dull and you like it shiny so you can see yourself."

"There won't be any dinner," Sally said calmly now, realizing they couldn't last a minute without her. She listened patiently for several moments more until Kyle's footsteps trailed down the stair. She closed her eyes. A drowsiness was overtaking her like a spell, and she moved to the bedroom window where she thought she saw the midget standing statue-still in the middle of the garden, his uplifted arms immersed in red light. She backed away from the vision, slipped her clothes off and lay back on the bed. They could all go to hell.

The sound of whispers or the wind humming through the screen window. I face the darkness of it, straining to hear. I try to prop myself up on my elbows, but fail. Tucked beneath me, an arm is fast asleep. It feels nothing. The breeze whispers now and then. The sheer Dacron curtains hang motionless and glisten as if with blue light. During the day they are peach glaze, the same as the bedspread, but now they are transformed. I turn my head from the window and a sliver of golden light strikes my eyes. The room darkens by contrast. Who's there? I moan, rub my eyes. Blood edges through my numb arm.

"Kyle!" I search his half of the bed with the good one.

"She is awake."

"Sh!"

"That you, Kyle?" It is my husband's dull voice, even at a whisper. "Come to bed, Kyle, it must be past midnight."



Something scrapes on the floor. Something heavy. My eyes adjust to the darkness and there sits Kyle in the big barrel chair. He has moved it to the foot of my bed. Janie fidgets on his lap, one arm slung around his neck, the other holds a bag of popcorn.

"Kyle. What time is it?"

"Late night time," he answers. Janie starts to whine.

"You must be starving, poor baby. Mama'll fix you something," I say and start to curl off the bed, but Kyle orders me to stay as still as a snake in a hen house. He looks past his shoulder into the darkness, and the darkness answers with an approving laugh. The midget!

I reach for the bedspread, think instead of self-defense, and grope for the glass ashtray on the nightstand. My hand disobeys. It sleeps still, numb. The night air is oppressive.

The midget steps from the shadows, bows gracefully into the bright light. "Madame."

"Now," Janie says, rubbing her father's thick neck. Kyle gawks and blinks, leans forward. He never has his glasses when he needs them.

The Day-glo painted ashtray torments me. It lodges in the corner of my eye like a match spark.

"Isn't it a lovely summer's eve," the midget coos. His hand falls, accidentally, to the bed, near enough my leg for me to feel its warmth.

"A dark night, all but moonless, as soothing to the soul as a lover's troth."

"I don't see no horsies, daddy. You said."

"Hush. How do you think daddy is going to hear what's going on with you talking? Besides, give me a handful of that popcorn," Kyle says without even breaking for air.

I say to the midget, "You get off my bed or

my husband'll crack your skull," and that knocks the corners off his smile.

He gestures toward the window with a sweeping hand. "It is the whippoorwill and not the lark that makes me think of you."

"Lark, my ass," Kyle complains. "There ain't no larks within a thousand miles of Georgia. If anything, she's a crow," and even my little girl giggles at this and starts to caw.

How can he say that about me, and in front of the midget, too? If I give in, I think, just a little, that will bring Kyle around. He'd be jealous mad. "See," I say, "see what a liar that midget is." I swing my leg as if to kick but instead touch the midget's hand gently with my toe. He arches his fingers into a spider and crawls onto my feet. Hairy feelers tickle my ankle.

"Your skin," he says, his voice very soft, "is as soft and sweet as the pink-cheeked peach licked gently by the dewy tongue of dawn."

No one has ever compared my skin to fruit before. But Kyle just sits, sucking salt off his fingers. Janie throws the empty bag down and starts to sing, "Cobbler, daddy, peach cobbler."

"Honey, I'll give you some," I say to my poor starving little girl, and the midget answers, "Such a gift would make me the happiest man alive." His eyes glow red in the reflected ashtray light.

"Your eyes," The midget sighs deeply and advances his position on my bed. His forehead is broad and slick as wax. "They are like diamonds, your cheeks brocade the finest silk merchants have yet to see. Were my lips rubies tried upon those cheeks, were my fingers threads of light woven in the fabric of your dawn."

I test the skin of my face and remember Kyle's handkerchief, once a satin nightgown.

Kyle drums his fingers on the armrest. Janie rocks back and forth on his leg like a cowgirl.

"What's he telling her all that stuff for," Kyle says. "You'd think he was selling her some kind of smelly face lotion or something."

My hands are smoothing the skin of my thighs now. I feel the warmth there. Kyle yawns, and I think, It is working. I close my eyes, call out his name, and soon he is there beside me. The bed quakes, then settles. Kyle touches my thighs. Behind closed eyes, I see a young Kyle's face, his lips tight and salt crystals caked at the corners.

"Janie!" I realize suddenly, but the midget is reassuring: "Fast asleep, poor child, dreaming of the day's labor," then, "Are you enjoying yourself?" His words seem far away, muffled.

"Oh, yes," I manage to say, feeling lighter than I can remember, light as a sparrow.

"Kyle certainly seems to be enjoying himself also. He's breathing quite heavily now."

THE SEED

I hear little but my own breathing, rushing my ears like an ocean.

"He looks so very content." His words reach me on a southern gale.

"Oh, Kyle."

"Like a sleeping baby." Fainter.

"Kyle."

"Or a dead man."

"Kyle?"

"Or one sleeping."

I scream and shake violently, opening my eyes to the empty air. There, cradled between my legs, is the midget's head. He lifts it slowly, smiles. The glow from the ashtray ignites like a tongue of fire, and my awakened arm leaps. Glass shatters the midget's temple. Ash crowds the air. My eyes burn in the darkness. Someone coughs. Finally, light from the doorway floods the room.

It was much too late in the morning for Sally to have been left undisturbed in bed, and this made her question the dream. The sky was already fully blue and light. Wind moved small clouds and her curtains in waves. Silky peach glaze receding and the clouds of pure white. Mr. Waters strummed his ukulele. Three chords, the only ones he knew. They carried through the hall a richness Sally had not before been aware of, a simplicity, like the sound of her daughter's airy singing which was just now rising up to greet her. *Three blind mice. Three blind mice.* Their songs seemed oddly the same.

Sally looked about her, troubling, but the signs of proof were everywhere: the ashtray still on the nightstand, heaped with yellow butts; her skin cool and white where the breeze blew and her hands touched; the smell of fresh earth, not stale sex. She had slept soundly, so soundly in fact that what might have been quite real seemed now far away and fading, like spring-clouds. Only shadows remained.

She rose and went to the window. This was always her most pleasant time, spring. She watched the shifting dogwood branches, each tipped with lavender buds. Birds cut circles in the air, frightened fledglings that would surely collide but did not. When at last they had found safety in the high branches, the sound of the garden spade chipping off rock again set them in flight. The blue sky darkened with them, and below, Kyle was stooped toward the earth, digging excitedly. He shoveled dirt from a single hole. *Stupid*, Sally thought. Kyle didn't have the slightest idea of how to plant a garden. In the end it would be *she* who finished the job, who'd have to drag that lumpy sack of garden tools and seeds back to the shed. But there was cause for celebration, too, she suddenly realized: it seemed Kyle had finally sent that midget packing.

Sally made her mind up to pick something

bright from her closet, that red polyester sheath she had not worn since her younger sister's wedding, that and the pair of matching red pumps which were comfortable and classy and buried somewhere at the back of the closet. She dressed slowly, and after brushing her hair out so that it fell long about her shoulders, refreshing the glow in her cheeks with Moonlite Pink, and applying a subtle yet sleek new shade of red lipstick, she descended.

No one. In the living room, in the den. Even Janie was quiet, wherever she was. The house seemed strangely hollow. The echo of her heels filled each room and then came back to her. A certain excitement swirled through her and settled in her stomach. It moaned, and Sally thought of bacon and eggs, toast, fresh-brewed coffee, and catsup on the eggs.

So she went into the kitchen to prepare her feast.

When everything was nearly ready, Kyle walked in. Sally noticed him first on the top porch step, though her attention had been on the hardening poached eggs. He dusted his pants and boots off with a broom, then loudly stamped the cleats clean on the welcome mat for what seemed like a good five minutes. He had said, looking sheepishly in at her, "Sure smells good," and she had answered, "I made just enough for one."

Kyle stood by his wife's side now. "You won't have to worry no more after today," he guaranteed her.

"About your eating the breakfasts I make?"

He had almost smiled at this. "Now you know what I'm saying, honey. He's gone, got rid of him this morning. I been up since dawn, making things right. I even used my imagination."

The bacon browned evenly and smelled delicious. Kyle snatched a piece out of the hot oil and pushed it whole into his mouth. "Good!" he said and hulked off into the living room to catch the early movie on television. Sally used a spoon to scoop the eggs from the milky water and lowered them gently to the toast already buttered and sliced on her plate. She drained the bacon, smothered the eggs with catsup, and assembled the plate and a cup of black coffee on a serving tray. Sally stepped out of the house, onto the back porch.

From there, she watched her garden. She listened to the laughter inside and the tinny voices. It was a comedy; Kyle loved comedies. Fat sparrows caught her eye. They sang. They searched the earth where shoots would soon sprout, almost overnight. Several had gathered where Kyle newly turned the soil, and one buried its head deep within the mound. When it rose again, its find twinkled in the sun. Sally thought she saw a diamond-tipped stickpin in its mouth. ■



Cat People

IN PAUL SCHRADER'S REMAKE OF THE VAL LEWTON CLASSIC, PASSION TURNS HUMAN BEINGS INTO HOMICIDAL BEASTS. TZ'S ROBERT MARTIN TALKS WITH SCREENWRITER ALAN ORMSBY.

According to film authority John Brosnan, the film *The Cat People* was born at a Hollywood party in 1941. Among the guests was Charles Koerner, then head of RKO studios, an outfit that specialized in B-movie melodramas. Koerner was at the time planning to launch a series of low-budget horror pictures. Then, as now, it was felt in many executive offices that horror pictures needn't be particularly well-crafted to be successful; Universal's heyday of grade-B Gothics had come and gone, but Koerner was more than fortunate for having a producer named Val Lewton on his payroll.

Judging from the pictures that Lewton would later produce, he had learned a great deal from his nine years as an assistant to producer David O. Selznick. Though he never had the battery of writers that Selznick commanded, Lewton had learned how to sculpt their work, retaining the sort of melodrama demanded by the studio and his subject matter, yet maintaining a style that denied the graphic and sensational elements most often associated with the term "horror film." And while Lewton never had the star-making power of a Selznick, his leading ladies had a similar power in their presence. Frances Dee in *I Walked With a Zombie*, Margo in *The Leopard Man*, and the remarkable Simone Simon in his *Cat People* films radiate a mystique that is the genre equivalent of Selznick's young Hepburns and Leighs. The bizarre titles of the Lewton's films were invariably chosen by the studio heads for presumed box-office appeal, yet under these titles Lewton produced films that would continue to live in memory long after the same studio heads had driven RKO Radio Pictures into bankruptcy.

But it started at that long-ago party. Koerner was engaged in "shop talk" with another Hollywood party goer whose name and business is now long forgotten.

Koerner's anonymous companion, no doubt thinking of Universal's recent success *The Wolf Man*, suggested that the first of Koerner's series should be titled *The Cat People*, and the next day the suggestion became a studio order handed down to Lewton and his director for the project, Jacques Tourneur.

Lewton hated the title, but he set to work immediately on the script in collaboration with screenwriter DeWitt Bodeen, Tourneur, and editor Mark Robson. The script was not the best to come from Lewton and company, but was nevertheless remarkable as the first in a totally new style. The story concerned a young industrial designer who falls totally in love with a young fashion artist, played by Simon. Despite her will to resist, the two marry—but their relationship is haunted by the girl's belief, handed down to her by her Middle-European ancestors, that the act of love will turn her into a man-eating panther. Though such an animal does appear near the end of the film, the insert was only made at the command of the studio; the conclusion of the film remains deliberately ambiguous as to whether the girl was, indeed, a member of the race of were-cats.

The film was the first of a string of successful Lewton films, and in 1944 the director was coerced by RKO into making a "sequel," *Curse of the Cat People*, again starring Simone Simon. (In his most startling act of rebellion, Lewton delivered a picture with an entirely unrelated story that had, in fact almost nothing to do with cats.) The years since have seen a number of "cat creature" films slink into view, many of them Lewton-inspired. Now Universal Studios has launched a grade-A remake of the B-movie classic.

In fact, remake fever seems to have thoroughly infected Universal's executive offices through the past

Cat People

year. Howard Hawks's *Scarface*, for a time, was to be reworked by Brian DePalma, but the project seems to have been shelved, at least temporarily. Still in the works are John Carpenter's *The Thing*, *Dick Tracy* from John Landis, a new 3-D version of *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, with the director of the original, Jack Arnold, at the helm, and, to arrive this May, Paul Schrader's *Cat People*, from a script by Alan Ormsby.

Ormsby is best known to the general moviegoing audience as the screenwriter of *My Bodyguard*, one of last year's major "sleepers." More to the point in considering his role as screenwriter of *Cat People* is his filmmaking apprenticeship in the field of low-budget terror. His collaboration with Bob Clark, the director of *Murder by Decree*, produced two films of note. Their first, *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things*, with Ormsby as star, cowriter, and makeup technician, owed much to George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, and, as first efforts often do, asked much forgiveness of its audience. The second Clark-Ormsby film boasted Ormsby's first screenplay; variously titled *The Veteran*, *Dead of Night*, and *Deathdream*, it updates "The Monkey's Paw" into a story concerning a Vietnam veteran killed in action who is brought home by his mother's prayers, and successfully achieves the desired effect of a black fairy tale. Ormsby's last foray into screen terror was as writer and director of *Deranged*, a dark fable based upon the true story of Ed Gein, the mass murderer immortalized in Tobe Hooper's *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*.

"We don't think of *Cat People* as a remake at all," says Ormsby, "though it is a remake in the technical sense, and we have revised certain specific scenes—for instance, the swimming pool scene. I've always had strong memories of that film, and numbered it among my favorites, but when they screened it for me before I started writing, I was very disappointed in it. It had two or three terrific sequences, but the rest of it would barely make a tv-movie today—tame and talky and unresolved. Certainly in the context of the forties, after Frankenstein and mummies and wolf men, the picture was a breath of fresh air; and Val Lewton certainly deserves credit for using a very low budget to create a feeling of terror and suggestiveness, in an almost poetic atmosphere. Casting Simone Simon was itself a stroke of genius—she really conveyed a lot of that feeling in the original film.

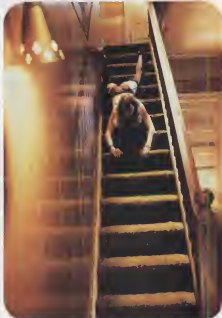
"But today you're dealing with a situation where each film is trying to outdo the one before, and the audience has come to expect that, especially in terms of the technology and state-of-the-art effects. That's one of the reasons why they'll leave the house to go to the movies. So a film at all like Lewton's would be a very risky commercial prospect today."

Ormsby was hired as screenwriter by *Cat People*'s producer, Chuck Fries, after three different scripts for the remake had already been commissioned and rejected. At Fries's request, Ormsby made no use of the earlier material, setting out to rebuild *Cat People* from scratch, so to speak.

It had already been decided that New Orleans would serve as the setting for the film, and it was generally assumed that the city's voodoo traditions would become a major part of the revised story. "I wasn't really



When a full-grown black panther turns up in a hotel room in New Orleans's red-light district, police summon zoologists Oliver Yates (John Heard) and Alice Moore (Annette O'Toole).



In the hotel the cat has savaged a call girl (Lynn Lowery), who barely escapes with her life.



Young Irena Gallier, recently reunited with her brother, is puzzled by his sudden disappearance and finds herself mysteriously drawn to the city zoo.

happy with the voodoo idea, though I liked the New Orleans setting," says Ormsby. "At that time Roger Vadim was scheduled to direct, so he and I went down there, and I began work on a forty-page treatment."

Ormsby's original treatment concerned a young woman who is brought to a New Orleans hospital for observation after she frees a leopard from a local zoo. A psychiatrist called in to consult in the case quickly develops a passion for the girl, resulting in a tragic love affair.

"I wasn't too happy with Oliver as a psychiatrist," says Ormsby, "so even though they accepted the treatment, I called them up a couple of weeks later and asked if I could make him a zoo-keeper, which struck me as fresher and a bit funny in an ironic sense. In my first draft, Irena was living with her brother, who was the leopard she helps to escape from the zoo. She had full knowledge of her cat nature, fell in love with Oliver, and attempted to break the voodoo spell. It also had a *Suddenly Last Summer* sort of quality—a jaded New Orleans family that had been in the slave trade some hundred years before and had offended a voodoo priest who then cursed them to an incestuous history."

It was shortly after this that Vadim dropped out of the picture. After a couple of idle months, Paul Schrader, screenwriter-director of *Blue Collar*, *Hardcore*, and *American Gigolo*, signed on.

"As I heard it," says Ormsby, "Schrader's agent recommended that he read the script. He was interested in directing from a script that he had not written himself. He read it and felt that, with a few changes, it could be a commercial property."

"The working relationship between Schrader and myself was excellent from day one. I agreed with his ideas, and we worked together in doing a third draft. Schrader did no actual writing on it; rather, he supervised. I liked what I had written, but I didn't care for the voodoo stuff. We both agreed on that and threw it out. We enlarged on one of the characters and elaborated and strengthened some other aspects of the script."

"After meeting with Schrader for three or four times, I went off and did a very fast rewrite—in about a month. At the time the actors' strike was hanging over everyone's head, and if that were to come about, no business would be transacted at the studios. But we got it in under the wire, and Universal accepted it."

The final script portrays Irena (Nastassia Kinski) as a young woman orphaned as a child in Central America and only recently reunited with her brother Paul (Malcolm McDowell). A young Pentecostal minister, Paul is well aware of the family curse, and has sought out his sister to propose his own crazed solution to their sexual problems. Paul's plans go awry, however, when Irena meets Oliver (John Heard), a young zoologist who has only recently survived an encounter with a savage leopard on the streets of New Orleans.

Though all concerned were satisfied with the script, at the time it was submitted neither *The Howling* nor *An American Werewolf* had yet been released. Ormsby acknowledges that both films in some ways anticipated his ideas for *Cat People*, resulting in some adjustments during shooting. As a particular example, Ormsby's script was originally laced with a number of visual



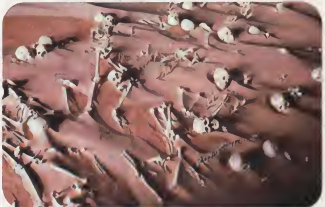
In a case of animal magnetism, Oliver finds himself falling in love with Irena when the two spend a platonic weekend at his woodland lodge.



Irena's missing brother Paul (Malcolm McDowell) returns with a revelation: the Galliers are cursed



transformed by passion into animals who can regain their human form only by shedding innocent blood



as part of an ancient tradition of human sacrifice.

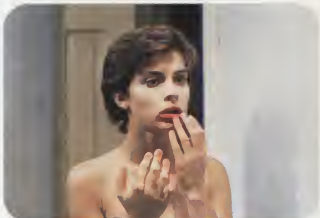


Paul proposes a bizarre solution to their plight—one which Irena violently rejects.

references to cats, some conveying Irena's feline bent, others equating Oliver's attraction to Irena with an erotic fascination with cat-nature. But because *Cat People* follows *The Howling*, which used similar references as a gently humorous nudge in the ribs—for instance, Slim Pickens's fondness for Wolf Brand chili—these have been reduced considerably.

Finally, we must wonder where *Cat People* fits into the current spectrum of "on-screen transformation" epics. The most obvious difference between *Cat People* and what's been seen before is the end result: rather than leading toward creatures of fantasy, the makeup designs must link human actors with the actual leopards that were used in filming. "The first draft wasn't at all explicit in that area," says Ormsby, "and the transformation was entirely off-screen. While I was doing the second draft I thought, 'Why not show it?' " Ormsby's own makeup experience had a major effect on the nature of the transformation sequences, which will differ considerably from what has been seen before. "I kept thinking, what would I do if I were doing the effects?" Ormsby says, "and I found that I loved the idea of a panther breaking through Irena's skin ..."

Though Universal's *Cat People* certainly offers the possibility of a grand transformation sequence (and though word has reached us that such sequences have been shot at the request of Universal), there are indications that director Paul Schrader has chosen to go with a more perfunctory sequence, only seconds in length, for fear that such spectacle may overwhelm the human dimension of the drama. Tom Burman, whose makeup studios are responsible for the final design and execution of these sequences, explained the situation when we asked him about rumors concerning post-production reshoots. "I was very pleased to work on *Cat People*," said Burman, "because they were planning to put more stress on the psychological aspects of the story than on the graphic elements. But when Universal saw it, they were apparently thinking of the success of pictures like *The Howling* and *An American Werewolf*, and so they wanted more of that sort of thing. We produced some very effective things for them, but when they edit it, they'll have the choice of dwelling on the graphic aspect, or bringing out the psychological elements. I do hope they'll choose the latter." **LB**



Irena's growing passion for Oliver begins to awaken her own animal nature.



Director Paul Schrader (right) and crew prepare the set for a sequence illustrating the Galliers' savage past.



Simone Simon played the feline temptress and Kent Smith her baffled husband in the original 1942 Lewton-Tourneur version.



The Thing from the Slush

by George Alec Effinger

THIS STORY'S TOTALLY RIDICULOUS, OF COURSE,
AND WE WERE GOING TO REJECT IT OUT OF HAND.
BUT THEN WE FIGURED: 'WHY TAKE CHANCES?'

Courane began his brisk stride even before the elevator doors opened completely to let him into the office. By the time the secretary looked up, he was already striding manfully, purposefully, resolutely across the deep blue shag. The secretary was the only reason for his determined air; there was nothing urgent waiting for him in his little cubicle. The secretary's name was Miss Weber. She was some dish. She had been hired to replace Miss Brant, who had been carried away screaming after being asked to appear in another one of these stories.

There was, in truth, nothing urgent waiting in Courane's office, but that is not to say that what *did*

wait wasn't desperate, maniacal, and overwhelming in number. They were manila envelopes, all addressed to Sandor Courane, Associate Fiction Editor, *Awesome Stories*. There were piles of envelopes, and each one had inside—like a gooey cream filling no adult human could safely consume—a short story. Maybe an epic of adventure or suspense or fantasy, but probably not. Probably the envelope contained a dog-eared manuscript—a third carbon of a high school English class assignment or some wrenching personal disclosures carved into paper with a Prussian blue crayon—that was neither exciting nor even interesting. It was infrequent that Courane received anything that was in truth even fiction; it was even

The Thing from the Slush

rarer when he got something Awesome. The title of his magazine was in some respects a misnomer, but a venerable one. That made it all right.

But all of this did not depress Sandor Courane. No, because he had come to understand something very important about his job as associate fiction editor: He had not been hired to ferret out gems of literature. He had not been hired to encourage struggling, talented writers out in the broad, comma-free precincts of our land. Sandor Courane had been hired to do only one thing with the immense mountain of terrible fiction that arrived each day: He had been hired to make it go away again.

What he faced was what is known in the trade as the slush pile. That referred to the vast accumulation of stories which, despite the Post Office, stacked up and towered up and made mounds in the editorial offices in the same way as mounds were built by the ancient Indians of Ohio, and for much the same reasons. A story may be submitted in one of three ways. An established professional author may send a story to his or her agent, who then passes it on in a nicer envelope with a more, shall we say, *imposing* cover letter (all of which the author will pay for handsomely later, but this is an author/editor story, and we don't want to mix up author/agent stories with it, not without complimentary Thorazine at least). Or the author may simply send the story directly to the editor, particularly if they are already acquainted professionally or in some other equally transactional manner. Now, the third method, and the most common, is for some poor Joe from Hannibal, Missouri, to package up what he believes to be the greatest short story since H. G. Wells's "The Congealed Prawn." Joe sends his story off with little idea of where it is going or what is going to happen to it once it gets there. He thinks that Ring Lardner and Dorothy Parker and Robert Benchley and Maxwell Perkins and Gertrude Stein are going to sit around at the Algonquin and discuss his little bit of literary effluvium. Well, sadly, that is not precisely what is going to eventuate.

They used to say that unsolicited manuscripts were "thrown over the transom." God only knows why. Sandor Courane didn't even have a door on his office, let alone a transom. He was thirty-four years old before he even looked up transom in the dictionary; he always thought the phrase had something to do with forming a rewarding relationship with a publisher, like getting married by jumping over a hoe or something.

Well, on this Monday morning there were three hundred and forty envelopes, all filled with hope and tripe in equal measure. You see, all the promising stories—the ones from reputable agents or professional authors with familiar names—all those had been selected from the stack before Courane

even arrived, and the Editor himself, who had a large office with a door and a window and a shelf of awards shaped like Robbie the Robot, was chuckling to himself and weeping and being enriched by new experiences of the human condition, but rejecting most of the truly fine pieces of writing because "they just didn't fit his current needs." His most urgent current need was finding out if Miss Weber, the secretary, lived alone, and all this laughing and crying was keeping him from making any progress at all on that front. But, generously, we will pass over value judgments here, as we did before, because the point of this present tale is entertainment and not enmity. Still, we know of a tiny, neglected bit of the Old Testament, in Leviticus or one of those books nobody ever reads, where it warns against the sins of the editor, and indicates that we writers will have the last laugh. We usually do.

Therefore it was with a deep, heartfelt, weary sigh that Sandor Courane plunged into the pools of literary branchwater that had formed in his cubicle. If ever he were to see his desk again, or its contents, or have any hope of paying his rent this month, or of finding out himself about Miss Weber, then he would have to make these manuscripts disappear. In the early days of his employment he toyed with the idea originated by the Italian postal service. When they got too far behind and couldn't deliver the vast



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backlog of letters and parcels entrusted to their care, they bravely admitted their defeat and dumped the entire load into the sun-drenched Adriatic and started over again. But Courane had dismissed that idea; it was unworthy, for he had taken a pledge upon becoming a professional author himself, that he would respect another man's right to make his own depredations upon our common language.

The first envelope was addressed simply to AWESOME STORIES. The nebbish who had sent in this masterpiece hadn't even bothered to look for a person's name on the magazine's masthead. Often, stories were submitted by people who had never even read the magazine; it was distressing how often Courane waded through dog stories or true confessions or collections of recipes. But this story seemed at first to belong at *Awesome*. It was a tale about the world after a nuclear holocaust (he persisted in spelling the word "nuclear," a pronunciation he had no doubt adopted from a particular aide to a particular Southern president in recent years). Of course, everyone knows that at least a few stories about this situation have already been written, and even made into movies with special effects and torn clothing, but a good slush pile reader knows that there is really no such thing as an idea too old or too worn that cannot be made fresh and new by a bit of genius. The story was about this guy who wandered around Newark, New Jersey, after everything had been blown to smithereens, and not very much happened. There was nobody to talk to, so the character mused aloud to himself all the time; but, given the circumstances, who can really object to that? The hero fought off a giant sewer alligator that had followed him from New York City, and he fought a pack of mutant rats and a few other things. Then he met a girl. They looked at each other, knowing full well what was going to happen later, offstage. "My name is Adam," he said.

"My name is Eve," she said.

End of story. With a motion whose deftness would have brought a gasp from Miss Weber, Courane clipped on a rejection slip: *Your story has been given personal consideration but is not suitable for publication in our magazine at this time. Because of the great quantity of submissions we receive, we are sorry that we cannot respond in a more personal manner.* The writer had thoughtfully included a return envelope and postage and so, just like that, the story vanished from this little corner of the publishing world forever.

Three hundred thirty-nine more to go. Most of the time, Courane didn't need to read the whole story to make a decision; sometimes he could judge from the illiteracy of the opening paragraphs that the remainder of the story wasn't worth bothering about. But the second manuscript he picked up had been sent in by Edmund Schooner Threadwell, a force to be reckoned with. Edmund Schooner Threadwell had a longing to be a writer that surpasseth all understanding. He turned out short stories the way vending machines in the drugstore produce plastic eggs with little toys in them. He sent in at least two or three stories to *Awesome* every week. Courane looked at this new one with mixed feelings; Threadwell was marginally talented, but as yet he hadn't written anything good enough to pass along to the Editor for a final decision. Courane had taken to handwriting encouraging comments on the rejection slips, to lift Threadwell out of the mire of slush that surrounded him. What Courane wanted to say, his better sense forbade him. He wanted to quote possibly the most marvelous response any critic ever gave an aspiring writer, what Samuel Johnson said to a young man after reading the kid's stuff: "Your manuscript is both good and original; but the part that is good is not original, and the part that is original is not good." Now, some cynical readers will claim that this story created Edmund Schooner Threadwell as just such a mediocre-to-poor writer only so that we could drag in that really neat quotation. Well, it's simply not true, and the ghastly, horrifying event that will occur in the next few pages will bear this out. But there are always the scoffers and doubters, and that is the price we must pay for literary celebrity.

The Threadwell manuscript was entitled "The Cellini Salt Cellar." It started off well enough:

"What a crazy boy he is!" smiled Carolyn as she walked down the long, narrow, white gravel-paved pathway to the Liberal Arts Building, which stood like a great angry red demon among the ancient oaks which have given this university the nickname "Tulane of the North." She had just had lunch with a friend, a boy from her home town named Bill

Taylor. Bill was handsome and serious, yet he had a way of making her laugh, which was why she thought often about becoming intimate with him, but he had inadvertently knocked over the salt shaker on the table. Carolyn had thought nothing of it, but Bill acted very strangely. He threw a pinch of the salt over his shoulder, swept the rest away, closed his eyes, and recited some inaudible incantation. "How amusing!" Carolyn had thought. But later, after they had parted with many mutual expressions of fondness, she remembered something he had said to her only the day before.

"You have to look out for the tableware in the U.C.," he had warned her, with what she had thought was an amusing imitation of desperation in his voice. At the time, she had thought it had been just another of his light-hearted jests. Now, however, she wasn't so sure. She decided to discuss the matter with Old Mose, the kindly, wise, white-haired old janitor of Ruggles Dormitory.

From there it went rapidly downhill in a convoluted way and developed into a horror story about a curse that had been placed upon an elaborate salt cellar fashioned by the great Italian goldsmith Benvenuto Cellini (1500-1571). The curse itself had been an error, because it had been laid down by a mad philosophy student in Prague or from Prague (Threadwell didn't make this clear) who had mistaken the artifact for something else entirely. How the Cellini masterpiece became involved with the college cafeteria salt shaker was too incredible even for the readers of *Awesome* to swallow, and how Bill Taylor became involved in the matter was never adequately explained. In any event, it turned out that Old Mose, the janitor, had once done some small service for Madame Blavatsky herself and had been given by her a lucky amulet, which saved all their lives in a denouement of great terror and modifiers. The end result was that Carolyn learned how strong and resourceful Bill Taylor was (even though he would have been chopped liver without the old janitor's mojo), and also she changed her major from French to Elementary Education.

Courane absolutely hated the story. It didn't have the slightest redeeming feature, except a mildly titillating section between a creature of pure evil and a walk-on co-ed who did become chopped liver shortly thereafter. So he clipped on the regular rejection slip, but felt obliged to pen a few words; he had established that precedent and now he was sorry. "Glad to see this," he wrote. "In the future, you might want to cut down on the adjectives." He was going to say further that the young

man should study the stories that were published in *Awesome* and its competitors, but he supposed Threadwell was doing that already. Many of his stories were lifted in whole or in part from the best material appearing in the field. He always showed good taste in his thievery.

Courane yawned and looked at his watch. He had been at work for fifteen minutes and read two stories. It seemed like a reasonable time to take his first break. He went out to get a cup of coffee and pass a few witticisms by Miss Weber, but he was disappointed to see that her desk was unattended. Maybe she was in an important meeting with the Editor, laughing or weeping with him, deciding the fate of the novel in America, or something equally vital. Courane shrugged, poured himself a cup of lukewarm coffee, and went back to his cubicle. He sat down and selected a story, tore open the envelope, and put the manuscript, "My Most Unforgettable Night of Sheer Horror," down in the tiny clearing he had made among the stacks. The first step he took in critically appraising the story was to spill the cup of coffee all over it. He jumped up swearing and tried to mop up the coffee with the discarded envelope. He went out and got a handful of paper napkins and did the best he could, but "My Most Unforgettable Night" was a sodden ruin. Courane gave a sad little smile, clipped a rejection slip to the limp, marinated pages, and tucked them into the return envelope. It sailed through the air into the large brown Out box. In a way, it was a shame there wasn't an endless river of coffee in the outer office; it would speed up his job enormously.

The next story came from a person in Brazzaville, the capital of the People's Republic of the Congo. All that Courane knew about Brazzaville was it was where Humphrey Bogart and Claude Rains talked about going at the end of *Casablanca*. It had taken several months for the envelope to wend its way from the heart of darkness to Courane's desk on the Great White Way, and it was in rugged condition. Making sure that no coffee remained in his small work space, he pulled the typewritten pages out of the envelope and glanced curiously through the cover letter. "Dear Sirs," the author began, "I have always had a yen to write, but being a missionary doctor has left me with little time for such pleasures. Yet I always felt that I had a few little shreds of wisdom that I might pass on, particularly since my work has taken me to many of the more fascinating and out-of-the-way spots on our globe. I hope you enjoy reading the enclosed story, and I will be waiting enthusiastically for your reply. Yours sincerely, Dr. Francis X. Misouke."

For five, maybe ten seconds, the story captured Courane's imagination. To tell the truth, it was Dr. Misouke's cover letter that intrigued him.



Courane frankly expected a story of some exotic nature, something with an exciting foreign flavor, nothing he would be able to use in the magazine, of course, but at least a change of pace from the usual run of pieces set in New York or Los Angeles. A weakness of beginning writers is that often they resist writing about the very things they know most about, and prefer instead to make great galloping intermigrations into places and situations that only show up their profound ignorance.

To this extent, Courane was gratified; the story was set in a small native village to the northeast of Brazzaville. It was about a salt shaker left behind by Henry Morton Stanley that was now possessed by the spirit of a terrible tribal demon. Rather than creating some Old Mose character, which in this instance would have really been coals to Newcastle, Dr. Misouke's hero saved everyone's life by reciting about an hour's worth of Holy Scripture.

"Well," thought Courane as he wrote out a note to the Congolese author, "that certainly is a coincidence."

Hours passed; stories cried out at being from their envelopes untimely ripp'd; they shivered naked beneath Courane's merciless scrutiny, then retired, meek and submissive, to their purgatorial fate in the big brown box. By lunchtime, Courane had read over a hundred stories. Seven of them had been about haunted salt shakers; he found that unusual.

It was unusual, to say the least, to receive so many stories on a similar storyline. It's all well and good to say that there's nothing new under the sun; and authors speak all the time of picking story ideas out of the air, so that two writers in different places in different circumstances may suddenly respond to the same combination of news items, pop song lyrics, specials at the A & P, or whatever else it is that seduces inspiration. There are many instances of well-respected professionals turning out stories on identical themes with no plagiarism or even discussion between them. That is coincidence. Seven salt shakers before lunch, now, *that* was something else. And it got worse.

Courane went to a lunch at a little place on East Fifty-ninth Street that served the best veal parm in town. All the first readers (as they called themselves) in the New York publishing world ate there, and when he entered the restaurant they

greeted him warmly and fraternally. He was young and bright and cheerful, and none of his own novels had done any better than theirs, so he was well-liked. He sat down at a table across from Norris Page, who read the slush pile for Ciphers Books. His job was a little different from Courane's; novel submissions were, of course, longer, bulkier, and more time-consuming. Yet Page approached them in exactly the same way, by looking briefly at the first chapter, maybe the second chapter, then flipping to the end. A lot of the time the last line was "'And my name is Eve,' she said," and it made decisions very simple. But one time in a hundred there was a good book lurking in the pile; and Page was proud of two novels that he had discovered, recommended to his boss, seen through all the editorial decision-making, and, at last, watched proudly as they sprang forth, fully armed, into the world. It was a matter of some irony that one of these books had beaten out one of Page's own for a Robbie the Robot Award the year before.

"Read any good stories lately?" asked Page, after Courane ordered his lunch.

Courane winced. "Not one all morning that I could pass up the ladder. You've never seen such a pile of pure muck."

Page shrugged. "I know the feeling. I wanted to save this one book to show you. It was a classic. In only a hundred and fifty pages, this guy managed to drag in every single cliché in the business, and still have time left over for a great adolescent wish-fulfillment love interest and a surprise ending where it turns out the characters haven't been people at all but giant mutant vegetables living in what was once New York City following the destruction of civilization. And guess what the names of the boy vegetable and the girl vegetable were."

Courane just raised a weary hand. "Why would you think I'd want to take a look at something like that? I get enough aggravation. Just today—" Courane paused; a fugitive thought made him shiver with something like fear, but he couldn't bring it clearly into focus. "Norris, have you ever noticed that sometimes stories will come in batches? Like one day you'll have a lot of UFO stories and another day you'll have a lot of hollow earth stories?"

Before Page could answer, Howard Glessman spoke up. He was sitting at the next table; he was

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the first reader for a line of books that everyone else in the restaurant considered far below theirs in quality. In fact, Glessman's publisher seemed to think his audience consisted of casually literate people with the intelligence of simple sponges or coelenterates. "It happens all the time, all the time," said Glessman. "And it's something you have to watch out for. It's *not* just a harmless coincidence. You can't just pass it off. It means that there's something happening in the collective unconscious, that the great mass mind is mulling something over, and if you're smart you'll go along with it."

Courane and Page exchanged knowing looks. Glessman had been a reader for the same publisher for twenty-seven years, and it was common knowledge that more than a little of the slush he had waded through had seeped upstairs and irreparably affected his powers of reason. When he used phrases like "collective unconscious," the others immediately disregarded anything that he said afterward. Glessman got up and took his bill to the cashier. Courane looked after him. "Twenty-seven years," he said, fear and wonder in his voice.

"It shows, though, doesn't it?" said Page. "I heard how he got his job in the first place. The publisher needed a slush reader, so he dug a deep pit in front of the office on Fifty-fourth Street, and covered it with branches and shrubbery. Then he put up a big sign that said, 'Warning! This is a trap!' And if anyone was dumb enough to come along, read the sign, and still fall into the pit, he was perfect material to read the kind of submissions they get."

"That can't be true," said Courane, but he had heard stranger stories and many of them *had* been true. "I brought it up because I had seven stories this morning, all about salt shakers possessed by the devil or cursed or something like that. *Salt shakers*. That was just too weird."

"It happens," said Page with a shrug. "A statistical quirk."

"Well," said Page, "I got to go. I just can't wait to get back to the office and see what else is in that stack."

"I'll bet." Courane left with his friend, and they parted outside the restaurant. Page could walk back to work, but Courane had to take a crosstown bus.

There were five more salt shaker stories in the afternoon's reading, bringing the total to twelve. Each time a manuscript looked like it was heading off in the direction of silverware or receptacles of condiments of any kind, Courane's heart began to beat faster. His face broke out in a cold sweat, and he had several other symptoms which he had often read about but never before experienced. At last, well past suppertime, he had disposed of the last of the three hundred forty manuscripts. Twenty or so

had been good enough for him to put in a special pile for the Editor to read, and the others were even now mixed together in the Out box like the offensive and defensive squads of the absolute worst football teams in the NFL: beneath it all a fumble may have taken place, but it was almost not worth it to sort through the whole mess to find out. It was Courane's supreme good fortune that he didn't have to, because that was the Post Office's duty, which may well explain several things about their attitude.

Ten days later, with the salt shaker-story phenomenon all but forgotten, he was slashing his way through the morning's produce (sometimes he thought of his cubicle as a kind of old-fashioned farmer's market, where people brought the fruits of their gardens to offer them for sale and, at the end of the day, when none of it had brought a profit, the stuff could at least be trundled home and thrown on the compost heap to enrich the next crop), and there was another story from Edmund Schooner Threadwell. Courane groaned. "My lucky day," he thought. This one had a brief cover letter; Threadwell had taken to speaking to Courane in a very conversational, friendly way, as if they were well-acquainted, which, in a manner of speaking, they were, although they had never met in person.

"Dear Sandy," said the letter. "Sorry that the Cellini story didn't work for you. Here is my latest. I call it 'The Werewolf in the Garden.' It's kind of my first real approach at humor, although on another level it's basically a mordant tale of innocent evil, and I hope you like it. I was inspired by reading Thurber all afternoon and then going out to the Loew's Nadir for a midnight double feature of Lon Chaney, Jr. in *The Wolf Man* and Harold Lloyd in *Safety Last*, so what resulted was either going to be what you're about to read or a story about Maria Ouspenskaya climbing the outside of a brick building in California. I don't think I've ever thanked you for your interest in my stories; some of the editors at the other magazines have been less than kind. But I can't emphasize how important it is to me that one of these stories gets accepted soon. My friends have decided to—"

Courane never learned what Threadwell's friends had decided to. He was unmoved by cover letters, by threats, by pleadings, by bribes, by offers of physical intimacy, by whatever the unpublished writer might include to overcome the weakness intrinsic to the manuscript itself. It rather disappointed him that Threadwell would descend to such tactics; he had hoped the young man was above all that. When it came right down to it, the whole game rode on the story. It didn't make any difference how neatly it was typed or how desperate its author's

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plight: if the story worked, it lived, and if it didn't, no amount of cover letter CPR could enliven it.

"The Werewolf in the Garden" was not so bad as "The Cellini Salt Cellar" had been, and was, in fact, only unmemorable. Or it *would* have been unmemorable except that fully seventeen stories of virtually identical nature kept reminding him of it during the rest of the day. All the discomfort he had experienced during the salt shaker coincidence returned, heightened, deepened, and intensified. Courane realized that it had been a Threadwell that started both synchronic runs of stories. It was unnatural. It defied mathematics, it defied reason, it defied Courane's fundamental beliefs in the way the writing profession operated. He began to give little shrieks that afternoon, every time a new supernatural-creature-in-the-garden story revealed itself. After lunch, Miss Weber became concerned and ducked in after each little shriek, but Courane told her it was nothing to worry about, that he had ordered something else for lunch instead of his usual, and that he was merely going into oregano shock. Miss Weber's fears were calmed, but not his own. It was seven o'clock when Courane finished his day's work, and he left the office in a dazed and sickly state. He didn't go directly home, but joined Norris Page for a few medicinal Bombay gin and tonics.

"I think I've had it," Courane confessed into his drink. He was addressing the floating piece of lime.

"You've got to stick it out. We all go through this." Page was Courane's best friend and only real confidant.

"No, Norris, I don't think I can face it any more. I can't look at another paragraph of that—"

Page grabbed Courane by the labels and spun him around. His face, already dark in the darkness of the bar, darkened some more. "Listen, Sandy," he shouted, "do you want all the rest of them to say you didn't have the *guts*? That when the chips were down, you didn't have the *right stuff*? That you don't even measure up to somebody like ... like Howard Glessman?"

That was a low and cruel blow, but it was just what Courane needed. "You're right," he murmured. He turned back to his drink, had five more, and in

the morning everything was fine again.

And things remained fine for a week, for ten days, for two weeks. He read the everlasting stories, pleased now and again when he discovered a good one. There were no more unusual coincidences. His lunches with the gang were rewarding, Miss Weber seemed more interested in his well-being than in exercising her emotions with the Editor, and all in all it began to seem that this little history was working its way toward a happy and terror-free conclusion. But Sandor Courane could not know what sort of forces had allied themselves against him, and so he went on blithely, day to day, as if his fate were not in the hands of a young man at a typewriter.

The story arrived at the *Awesome* office on the day after Labor Day. It had been almost a month since Edmund Schooner Threadwell had sent anything in, and Courane wondered if that meant Threadwell had given up at last, packed it in and joined the Navy, or found a job in a useful line of work more secure than fiction writing. Courane had already read scores of stories on that fateful September day, and had rescued only one from the ravenous Out box. The editor had left early to attend a special ceremony for a senile old fud who, fifty years before, used to write stories about forces man should not tamper with. Miss Weber had evanesced like a wraith precisely at five o'clock. Courane was all alone in the *Awesome* suite. The lights were off in the outer office. It was still and silent, yet the evening was filled with tiny noises: the buzzing and clicking and tiny tapping that mean nothing and grow only to fill the absence of human occupancy. There were eight manuscripts left for Courane to read. The next one was the Threadwell. Courane closed his eyes and massaged his temples. He wondered if he had the sheer resolve to endure it; he considered briefly leaving the Threadwell story and the others until the next day. But in the morning there would be another heavy blizzard of stories, and he would blame himself for his laziness. So he sliced open the envelope and took out Threadwell's latest.

"Dear Sandy," went the cover letter, "how sad it makes me that you sent back 'The Werewolf in the Garden.' I think I lavished more time and effort on that story than any other, except this one. It is called 'The Vengeance of the Acolyte,' for reasons that will soon be clear. Well, this is the last story of mine that you will be reading, so I can't help feeling just a touch of sentiment, but I've made my decision and I'll stick with it. I hope you enjoy the story."

The Vengeance of the Acolyte
by Edmund Schooner Threadwell

Brick Stafford sat at his desk, alone in the offices of *Vapid Stories*, a magazine that published mediocre fiction aimed at a mediocre

The Thing from the Slush

audience. It was Stafford's job to make a first examination of all the stories submitted to the publication, and to determine which of them deserved further consideration.

Courane's eyebrows raised as he read the first two pages. This new story was a surprise, a departure from Threadwell's usual grotesque idea of what constituted entertaining reading. It was also surprising how clearly the young man visualized the setting—which, by the way, was just like Courane's office down to the last detail. The story moved along slowly, describing Brick Stafford, describing his fatigue, mentioning the frustration inherent in his job and his lonely life and his own career. Threadwell had never before bothered very much about characterization and motivation, essential story elements that he had always sacrificed in favor of poor prose. All the slush readers knew Threadwell; their verdict was that he might not be good, but he was lengthy. If anyone ever started a magazine or an anthology called *Loquacious Tales*, Threadwell's fortune was made.

"This is just awful," thought Brick Stafford, as he pinned a rejection slip on the tenth story of the morning. "It's just like all the others. It *can't* be a coincidence. All ten stories have been about shape-changing alien creatures kidnapping famous Hollywood movie-music composers! And yesterday, all the stories were about invasions of vampire pillows. I wonder what it all means . . ."

"Why," thought Courane, "the character in this story has asked himself many of the same questions I've asked in the last few weeks."

In the days that followed, Brick Stafford ignored the repeated warnings. He kept a journal, noting the days when stories arrived in groups related by plot. He gathered quite a bit of information, yet he still didn't understand its ultimate meaning. And, of course, no one else would believe him or even listen to him, and nowhere did he get any sound advice.

Courane's hands began to perspire. His mouth was dry, and he could hear the blood rushing through his ears. He turned the pages, and they rustled in his trembling hands.

But Brick Stafford was not the kind of man to run from such a threat. If they thought they could intimidate him, he'd make them pay dearly. He went on with his work, as distasteful as it now was to him. The clock ticked on; it was night in the great city, and Stafford was alone


among ten million people, one courageous but foolish man in an empty tower of concrete and glass. He heard the chime that signaled the arrival of the elevator on his floor. "Who could that be?" he wondered.

The chime of the elevator sounded from beyond Courane's cubicle. "Who could that be?" he wondered.

"And I'm sure there's some significance to the fact that these stories come in groups," thought Stafford, as he drank his coffee, "but perhaps I'll *never* learn precisely what it all means." As yet he was unaware of the three visitors that had found their way into the *Vapid* offices. There was the slush-thing, a creature of slime and filth that slid and slithered across the deep blue shag of the outer office. There was the great robot, a mechanical behemoth that creaked and whirred with evil intent. And there was the young man who controlled them, a good man driven by deprivation and scorn to seek revenge against those who ignored him.

Courane tried to swallow, but he couldn't. He listened. There were no sounds from the outer office. There were no sounds at all, except a kind of wet *slishing*, and a kind of regular, jangly grating, and what his imagination told him was low, dreadful, wry laughter. Surely it was only his imagination. He read on.

In the morning, Miss Johnson found his remains. She screamed and collapsed, and later, when the police investigators arrived, she was taken by ambulance to a hospital where she was treated for shock. She was never the same again. But, then, neither was Brick Stafford. Detective Rogers had never seen anything so gruesome in all his years on the police force. "And there are no clues at all," he muttered. "Nothing but this disgusting wet trail on the carpet, and these loose screws. We'll never figure this one out."

Courane finished the story and took a deep breath. Threadwell had hit too close to home with that one. It had interfered with Courane's objectivity; he had let himself get emotionally involved with old Brick Stafford, but nevertheless the story wasn't any better than any of Threadwell's previous attempts. He reached for a rejection slip. He heard a clank, a gush, and a low-pitched snicker. "Naw," he thought as he clipped on the rejection, "it couldn't be." 

SURELY TEACHER WAS RIGHT, AND GRANDMA WAS WRONG.
SURELY NUMBERS NEVER LIED, AND FOLK TALES WERE FOR CHILDREN.
AND SURELY THERE WAS NOTHING IN THE WELL LIKE . . .

OLD FILLIKIN

BY JOAN AIKEN

Miss Evans, the math teacher, had thick white skin, pocked like a nutmeg grater; her lips were pale and thick, often puffed out with annoyance; her thick hair was the drab color of old straw that has gone musty; and her eyes, behind thick glass lenses, stared angrily at Timothy.

"Timothy, how often have I *told* you," she said. "You have *got* to show you're working. Even if these were the right answers—which they are not—I should give you no marks for them, because no working is shown. How, may I ask, did you arrive at this answer?"

Her felt-tip pen made two angry red circles on the page. All Timothy's neat layout—and the problems were tidily and beautifully set out, at least—all that neat arrangement had been spoiled by a forest of furious red X's, underlinings, and crossings-out that went from the top to bottom of the page, with a big W for Wrong beside each answer. The page was horrible now—like a scarred face, like a wrecked garden—Timothy could hardly bear to look at it.

"Well? How did you get that answer? Do you

understand what I'm asking you?"

The trouble was that when she asked him a sharp question like that, in her flat, loud voice, with its aggressive north-country vowels—*answer, ask*, with a short "a" as in "grab" or "bash"—he felt as if she were hammering little sharp nails into his brain. All at once his wits completely deserted him, the inside of his head was a blank numbness, empty and echoing like a hollow pot, as if his intelligence had escaped through the holes she had hammered.

"I don't know," he faltered.

"You *don't know*? How can you not *know*? You must have got those answers *somehow*! Or do you just put down any figures that come into your head? If you'd got them *right*, I'd assume you'd copied the answers from somebody else's book—but it's quite plain you didn't do that—"

She stared at him in frustrated annoyance, her eyes pinpointed like screw tips behind the thick glass.

Of course he would not be such a fool as to copy someone else's book. He hardly ever got a sum



right. If he had a whole series correct, it would be grounds for instant suspicion.

"Well, as you have this whole set wrong—plainly you haven't grasped the principle at all—I'll just have to set you a new lot. Here—you can start at the beginning of Chapter VIII, page 64, and go as far as page 70."

His heart sank horribly. They were all the same kind—the kind he particularly hated—pages and pages of them. It would take him the whole weekend—and now, late on Friday evening—for she had kept him after class—he was already losing precious time.

"Do you understand? Are you following me? I'd better explain the principle again."

And she was off, explaining; her gravelly voice went on and on, about brackets, bases, logarithms, sines, cosines, goodness knows what. But now, thank heaven, his mind was set free, she was not asking questions, and so he could let his thoughts sail off on a string, like a kite flying higher and higher . . .

"Well?" she snapped. "Have you got it now?"

"Yes.—I think so."

"What have I been saying?"

He looked at her dumbly.

But just then a merciful bell began to ring, for the boarders' supper.

"I've got to go," he gasped, "or I'll miss my bus."

Miss Evans unwillingly gave in.

"Oh, very well. Run along. But you'll *have* to learn this, you know—you'll never pass exams, never get *anywhere*, unless you do. Even farmers need math. Don't think *I* enjoy trying to force it into your thick head—it's no pleasure to *me* to have to spend time going over it all again and again—"

He was gathering his books together—the fat, ink-stained gray textbook, the glossy blue new one, the rough notebook, the green exercise book filled with angry red corrections—horrible things, and he loathed the very sight and feel of them. If only he could throw them down the well, burn them, never open them again. Some day he would be free of them.

OLD FILLIKIN

He hurried out, ran down the steps, tore across the school courtyard. The bus was still waiting beyond the gate; with immense relief he bounded into it and flung himself down on the prickly moquette seat.

If only he could blot Miss Evans and the hateful math out of his mind for two days; if only he could sit out under the big walnut tree in the orchard, and just draw and draw and let his mind fly like a kite, and think of nothing at all but what picture was going to take shape under his pencil, and in what colors, later, he would paint it . . . But now that plan was spoiled, he would have to work at those horrible problems for hours and hours, with his mind jammed among them, like a mouse caught in some diabolical machinery that it didn't invent, and doesn't begin to understand.

The bus stopped at the corner by a bridge, and he got out, climbed a fence, and walked across fields to get to the farm where he lived. There was a way round by a cart track, the way the postman came, but it took longer. The fields smelt of warm hay, and the farmyard of dry earth, and cattlecake, and milk, and tractor oil; a rooster crowed in the orchard, and some ducks quacked close at hand; all these were homely, comforting, familiar things, but now they had no power to comfort him—they were like helpless friends holding out their hands to him as he was dragged away to prison.

"These are *rules*, can't you see?" Miss Evans stormed at him. "You have to learn them."

"Why?" he wanted to ask. "Who made those rules? How can you be certain they were right? Why do you turn upside down and multiply? Why isn't there any square-root of minus one?"

But he never had the courage to ask that kind of question.

Next morning he went out and sat with his books in the orchard, under the big walnut, by the old well. It would have been easier to concentrate indoors, to work on the kitchen table, but the weather was so warm and still that he couldn't bear not to be out of doors. Soon the frosts would begin; already the walnut leaves, yellow as butter, were starting to drift down, and the squashy walnut rinds littered the dry grass and stained his bare feet brown; the nights were drawing in.

For some reason he remembered a hymn his granny used to say to him:

"Every morning the red sun
Rises warm and bright,
But the evening soon comes on
And the dark cold night."

The words had frightened him, he could not say why.

He tried to buckle his mind to his work. "If $r > 4$, r weighings can deal with $2r-1$ loads—" but his thoughts trickled away like a river in sand. He had been dreaming about his grandmother—who died two years ago. In his dream they had been here, in the orchard, but it was winter, thick grey frost all over the grass, a fur of frost on every branch and twig and grassblade. Granny had come out of the house with her old zinc pail to get water from the well. "Tap water's no good to you," she always used to say. "Never drink water that's passed through metal pipes, it'll line your innards with tin, you'll end up clinking like a moneybox. Besides, tap water's full of those florides and kloorides and wrigglers they put in it (letting on as it's for your good—hah!). I'd not pay a penny for a hundred gallons of the stuff. Well water's served me all my life long, and it'll go on doing. Got some taste to it—not like that nasty flat stuff."

"I'll wind up the bucket for you, Granny," he said, and took hold of the heavy well handle.

"That's me boy! One hundred and eight turns."

"A hundred and eight is nine twelves. Nine tens are ninety, nine elevens are ninety-nine, nine twelves are a hundred and eight."

"Only in your book, love. In mine it's different. We have different ones!"

An ironic smile curved her mouth, she stood with arms folded over her clean blue-and-white print overall while he wound and counted. Eighty-nine, ninety, ninety-one, ninety-two . . .

When he had the dripping, double-cone-shaped well bucket at the top, and was going to tilt it, so as to fill her small pail, she had exclaimed, "Well, look who's come up with it! Old Fillikin!"

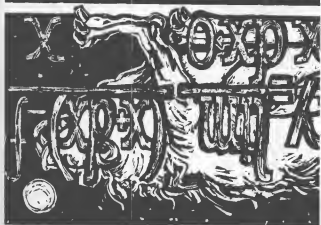
And that, for some reason, had frightened him so much that he had not dared look into the bucket but dropped it so that it went clattering back into the well and he woke up.

This seemed odd, remembering the dream in daylight, for he had loved his grandmother dearly. His own mother had died when he was two, and Granny had always looked after him. She had been kind, impatient, talkative, always ready with an apple, a hug, a slice of bread-and-dripping if he was hungry or hurt himself. She was full of unexpected ideas, and odd information.

"Husterloo's the wood where Reynard the fox keeps his treasure. If we could find that, I could stop knitting, and *you* could stop thinking. You think too much, for a boy your age."

"The letter N is a wriggling eel. His name is No one, and his number is Nine."

"Kings always die standing up, and that's the way I mean to die." She had, too, standing in the doorway, shouting after the postman, "If you don't



bring me a letter tomorrow, I'll write your name on a leaf, and shut it in a drawer!"

Some people had thought she was a witch, because she talked to herself such a lot, but Timothy found nothing strange about her; he had never been in the least frightened of her.

"Who were you talking to, Granny?" he would say, if he came into the kitchen when she was rattling off one of her monologues.

"I was talking to Old Fillikin," she always answered, just as, when he asked, "What's for dinner, Granny?" she invariably said, "Surprise pie with pickled questions."

"Who's Old Fillikin?" he asked once, and she said, "Old Fillikin's my friend. My familiar friend. Every man has a friend in his sleeve."

"Have I got one, Granny?"

"Of course you have, love. Draw his picture, call him by his name, and he'll come out."

Now, sitting by the well, in the warm, hazy sunshine, Timothy began to wonder what Old Fillikin, Granny's familiar friend, would have looked like, if he had existed. The idea was, for some reason, not quite comfortable, and he tried to turn his mind back to his math problem.

"R weighings can deal with 2:1 loads ..." but somehow the image of Old Fillikin would keep sneaking back among his thoughts, and, almost without noticing that he did so, he began to doodle in his rough notebook.

Old Fillikin fairly leapt out of the page: every stroke, every touch of the point, filled him in more swiftly and definitely. Old Fillikin was a kind of hairy frog; he looked soft and squashy to the touch—like a rotten pear, or a damp eiderdown—but he had claws

too, and a mouthful of needle-sharp teeth. His eyes were very shrewd—they were a bit like Granny's eyes; but there was a sad, lost look about them too, as there had been about Granny's; as if she were used to being misunderstood. Old Fillikin was not a creature that you would want to meet in a narrow high-banked lane, with dusk falling. At first Timothy was not certain of his size. Was he as big as an apple, so that he could float, bobbing, in a bucket drawn up from a well, or was he, perhaps, about the size of Bella the Tamworth sow? The pencil answered that question, sketching in a gate behind Old Fillikin, which showed that he was at least two feet high.

"Ugh!" said Timothy, quite upset at his own creation, and he tore out the page from his notebook, scrumpled it up, and dropped it down the well.

$$\frac{dy}{dx} = \lim_{dx \rightarrow 0} \frac{f(x + dx) - f(x)}{dx}$$

"Numbers!" he remembered Granny scoffing, years ago, when he was hopelessly bogged down in his seven-times table. "Some people think they can manage everything by numbers. As if they were set in the ground like bricks!"

"How do you mean, Granny?"

"As if you daren't slip through between!"

"But how can you slip between them, Granny? There's nothing between one and two—except one and a half."

"You think there's only one lot of numbers?"

"Of course! One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. Or in French," he said grandly, "it's *un, deux, trois—*"

"Hah!" she said. "Numbers are just a set of rules that some bonehead made up. They're just the fence he built to keep fools from falling over the edge—"

"What edge?"

"Oh, go and fetch me a bunch of parsley from the garden!"

That was her way of shutting him up when she'd had enough. She liked long spells by herself, did Granny, though she was always pleased to see him again when he came back.

"The arrow \rightarrow tends to a given value as a limit ..."

"Timothy!" called his father. "Aunt Di says it's lunchtime."

"Okay! Coming!"

"Did I see you drop a bit of paper down the well just now?"

"Yes, I did," he admitted, rather ashamed.

"Well, don't! Just because we don't drink the water doesn't mean that well can be used as a rubbish dump. After dinner you go and fish it out."

"Sorry, Dad."

OLD FILLIKIN

During the meal his father and Aunt Di were talking about a local court case: a man who had encouraged, indeed trained his dog to go next door and harass the neighbors, bite their children, and dig holes in their flowerbeds. The court had ordered the dog to be destroyed. Aunt Di, a dog lover, was indignant about this.

"It wasn't the dog's fault! It was the owner. They should have had *him* destroyed—or sent him to prison!"

"If I had a dog," thought Timothy, "I could train it to go and wake Miss Evans every night by barking under her window, so that she'd fall asleep in class. Or it could get in through her cat-flap and pull her out of bed..."

"Wake up, boy, you're half asleep," said his father. "It's all that mooning over schoolbooks, if you ask me. You'd better come and help me cart feed this afternoon."

"I've got to finish my math first. There's still loads to do."

"They give them too much homework, if you ask me," said Aunt Di. "Addles their minds."

"Well, you get that bit of paper out of the well, anyway," said his father.

He could see it, glimmering white, down below; it had caught on top of the bucket, which still hung there, though nobody used it. He had quite a struggle to wind it up—the handle badly needed oiling and shrieked at every turn. At last, leaning down, he was able to grab the crumpled sheet; then he let go of the handle, which whirled round crazily as the bucket rattled down again.

But, strangely enough, the crumpled sheet was blank. Timothy felt half relieved, half disappointed; he had been curious to see if his drawing of Old Fillikin was as nasty as he had remembered. Could he have crumpled up the wrong sheet? But no other had any picture on it. At last he decided that the damp atmosphere in the well must have faded the pencil marks—the paper felt cold, soft, and pulpy—rather unpleasant. He carried it indoors, and poked it into the kitchen coal stove.

Then he did another hour's work indoors, scrambling through the problems somehow, anyhow; Miss Evans would be angry again, they were certain to be wrong—but, for heaven's sake, he couldn't spend the whole of Saturday at the horrible task. He checked the results, where it was possible to do so, on his little pocket calculator; blessed, useful little thing, it came up with the results so humbly and willingly, flashing out solutions far faster than his mind could. Farmers need math too, he remembered Miss Evans saying; but when I'm a farmer, he resolved, I shall have a computer to do all those jobs, and I'll just keep to the practical work.

Then he was free, and his father let him drive the tractor, which of course was illegal, but he had been doing it since he was ten and drove better than Kenny the cowman. "You can't keep all the laws," his father said. "Some just have to be broken. All farmers' sons drive tractors. Law's simply a system invented to protect fools—" as Granny had said about the numbers.

That night Timothy dreamed that Old Fillikin came up out of the well and went hopping and flopping away across the fields in the direction of Markhurst Green, where Miss Evans lived. Timothy followed, in his dream, and saw the ungainly, yet agile creature clamber in through the cat-flap. "Don't! Oh, please, *don't!*" he tried to call. "I didn't mean—I never meant *that*—"

He could hear the flip-flop as it went up the stairs, and he woke himself, screaming, in a tangle of sheet and blanket.

On Sunday night the dream was even worse. That night he took his little calculator to bed with him, and made it work out the nine-times table until there were no more places on the screen.

Then he recited Granny's hymn: "Every morning the red sun/Rises warm and bright/But the evening soon comes on/and the dark cold night."

"If only I could stop my mind working," he thought. He remembered Granny saying, "If we could find Reynard's treasure in Husterloo wood, I could stop knitting, and you could stop thinking." He remembered her saying, "Kings die standing, that's the way I mean to die."


At last he fell into a light, troubled sleep.

On Mondays, math was the first period, an hour and a half. He had been dreading it, but in another way he was desperately anxious to see Miss Evans, to make sure that she was all right. In his second dream, Old Fillikin had pushed through her bedroom door, which stood ajar, and hopped across the floor. Then there had been a kind of silence filled with little fumbling sounds; then a most blood-curdling scream—like the well handle, as the bucket rattled down.

It was only a dream, Timothy kept telling himself as he rode to school on the bus; nothing but a dream.

But the math class was taken by Mr. Gillespie. Miss Evans, they heard, had not come in. And, later, the school grapevine passed along the news. Miss Evans had suffered a heart attack last night; died before she could be taken to hospital.

When he got off the bus that evening and began to cross the dusk-filled fields towards home, Timothy walked faster than usual, and looked warily about him.

Where—he could not help wondering—was Old Fillikin now? 



William Hope Hodgson

by Mike Ashley

It was the night of Friday, October 24, 1902. The Palace Theatre, Blackburn, in England's industrial north, was packed with people come to see the great American escapologist Houdini—the "Handcuff King." Houdini was at the height of his fame. Earlier, as publicity for his visit, he had escaped from the local jail. Now, as part of his stage act, he put forth his customary challenge that he would pay £25 (then equal to about \$125) to anyone who could bind him such that he could not escape.

On to the stage stepped the principal of the local School of Physical Culture, Mr. W. H. Hodgson. As agreed in a previous exchange of letters, he brought with him an assortment of irons, chains, and padlocks on loan from the local police. Houdini inspected the devices and claimed they had been tampered with (though Hodgson later denied this), but said that if the audience allowed him a little extra time, he would accept the challenge. Hodgson had a keen knowledge of the body's muscular control and he pinioned Houdini's hands with such force that the escapologist retorted that this was not a challenge to break his arms.

Finally fettered to Hodgson's satisfaction, Houdini retired to his curtained cabinet on the stage. After half an hour he requested that his hands be freed temporarily to allow his circulation to be restored. Hodgson refused, despite much protesting from Houdini's brother, a local doctor, and the audience. "If

Houdini is beaten," shouted Hodgson above the roars of the crowd, "then let him give in."

Two hours passed and the audience became ever more expectant. Blackburn's town clock had struck midnight before Houdini, exhausted, and with blood on his arms and his clothes torn, made good his escape, amidst rapturous applause. Houdini later maintained that Hodgson's treatment was the most cruel he had ever undergone.

I wonder how many people who have read about Houdini's remarkable life realize that Mr. Hodgson was the same William Hope Hodgson who would in later years establish himself as one of the greatest writers of terror stories of the sea in the English language. Did Houdini, who was himself interested in supernatural fiction, ever read any of Hodgson's stories or books and recall the night in Blackburn when he had come closest to being beaten?

William Hope Hodgson was a popular personality in Blackburn. Like Houdini, he was never averse to any publicity to help advertise his local Physical Culture school. Only two months before Houdini's visit, Hodgson had performed his own death-defying feat by riding a bicycle down a steep, narrow side street in Blackburn which consisted of sixty steps. As he neared the bottom a local resident rushed out in front of him to bar the way, but Hodgson had the bicycle "so completely under control," as the local paper tells us,

"that he had no difficulty in throwing himself from the saddle and landing on his feet." He then remounted and proceeded on his way "rejoicing!"

Hodgson opened his School for Physical Culture in 1899 (though some sources say it was not until 1901). Although only twenty-two at the time, he was already a fine physical specimen, having kept his body in perfect trim during eight years at sea. He had been born in the village of Blackmore End near the Essex-Suffolk boundary in East Anglia on November 15, 1877, the third of twelve children. His father was Anglican curate at the nearby church of Wethersfield. Wanderlust must have been instilled early in young Hope; his father had never stayed in one place for any length of time. As Hodgson grew from infancy to adolescence, his surroundings changed from Essex to Yorkshire to Nottinghamshire to London to Kent. From 1885 to 1889 Hope attended a boarding school at Margate in Kent, and for a period during those years he spent his summer holidays with the family at Ardahan in County Galway, Ireland, the place that would later be the setting for *The House on the Borderland*.

While at the boarding school, Hope ran away to sea. He was dragged back to face the wrath of his father. But within a year he ran away again, and this time, with the help of his uncle, Hodgson was apprenticed to the firm of Shaw & Savill in Liverpool in August 1891. He was still only four-

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teen, but his solid build enabled him to pass as a fifteen-year-old, the minimum age for apprentices. He served four years as an apprentice before becoming a qualified Seaman, and two further years' education made him an Officer in the Merchant Marine.

Hodgson's years at sea would take him three times around the world. In 1898 he saved the life of a fellow sailor in the shark-infested waters of Port Chalmers, and for this he received the Bronze Medal of the Humane Society. During this time Hodgson indulged in his favorite pastime apart from body-building: photography. He took many hundreds of photos of the sea in all its moods, and these served him well in his early years as a writer when he supplemented his income by giving illustrated lectures of his life at sea. Some of the photographs were published in 1900 in the *Illustrated London News*, but probably the most remarkable set of pictures were those published in 1907 under the title "Through the Vortex of a Cyclone." Taken in 1899 on a voyage out of San Francisco, they reveal Hodgson's obvious talent as a photographer and include what may well be the earliest photos ever taken of stalk lightning.

But Hodgson's early love of the sea grew to loathing, and after eight years he turned his back on it and settled with his mother, brothers, and sisters (his father had died in 1892) in Blackburn. Until then the family had been financially poor, but the death of a well-to-do grandfather left them well provided for and enabled Hodgson to open his School of Physical Culture. Although the school was popular, attendance was seasonal. In need of a further source of revenue, Hodgson turned to writing.

His first pieces were articles about health and body-building, starting with "Physical Culture versus Recreative Exercises" which appeared in the February 1903 issue of *Sandow's Magazine*, named after the famous strong man Eugene Sandow. Over the next couple of years Hodgson made a number of such sales, often including photographs to illustrate the exercises. Hodgson must have realized, however, that sales of this nature were limited and that he would need to branch out. It was, perhaps, not surprising that his

first choice would be horror fiction. He enjoyed stories of the fantastic and loved to thrill his younger brothers and sisters with atmospheric tales of his days at sea.

His first such sale, however, was not a nautical story but a macabre mystery about a series of murders, in the central park of a small town, which appear to be committed by a statue of the goddess Kali that had been brought to England from Calcutta. Entitled "The Goddess of Death" and published in the April 1904 issue of *The Royal Magazine*, the story lacked polish and showed Hodgson's inexperience, but it also bore signs of his natural gift for writing.

In 1904 the Hodgson family moved to the small Welsh coastal village of Borth, retaining the house in Blackburn for the winter. Hope, however, stayed at Borth, so with the house to himself for much of the year, and with the School of Physical Culture behind him, Hodgson devoted all his time to writing.

It was now that he drew upon his many experiences at sea. His fear of the sea is evident in all his stories, and nowhere will you find a story where he treats the sea as anything but an evil enemy. The first was "A Tropical Horror" (1905), about the *Glen Doom*, becalmed in the Pacific and menaced by a sea monster, a heap of "writhing, slimy coils" with "a vast slobbering mouth a fathom across." Hodgson adopted the difficult technique of telling the story in the first person present tense, yet he succeeded in sustaining a parade of horrific images with all the mastery of a seasoned writer. During the next twelve years he would write several score stories where he evoked the spirit of the sea in all its sinister, mysterious, and powerful moods.

Hodgson's landless world is one of weed-clogged seas, fungus-covered and rat-infested derelicts, giant octopi and monster crabs. "From the Tideless Sea" (1906), for instance, and its sequel "More News from the Homebird" (1907), create a world of tangible fear in the Sargasso Sea—"the Tideless Sea of the North Atlantic" where "one may see, spread out to the far horizon, an interminable waste of weed—a treacherous, silent vastitude of slime and hideousness." Hodgson succeeds in sustaining a



mood of hopeless solitude and desolation. The story relates a message, a plea for help to the outside world, from the survivors of the *Homebird* trapped in the Sargasso Sea for many years.

"The Shamraken Homeward-Bounder," "The Thing in the Weeds," "The Finding of the Graiken," "The Derelict," and the confusingly like-titled "The Mystery of the Derelict" are just some of Hodgson's many nautical tales of terror, several of which were collected as *Men of the Deep Waters* in 1914. (August Derleth later assembled another such compilation, as *Deep Waters*, in 1967.) But the story that I feel is his most atmospheric is "The Stone Ship" (1914). Again we are aboard a becalmed ship, this time the small barque *Alfred Jessup*, "twenty days out from London, and well down into the tropics." All is silent when suddenly the nightwatch hears the sound of running water "for all the world like the noise of a brook running down a hillside" followed by a "stupendous sort of croak, deep and somehow abominable," a queer, rank smell and a series of muffled explosions. In the distance they discern a vague, shapeless shining and lower a boat to investigate. A mist has settled on the waters, and one of the men feels something take hold of his oar. Through the mist they see a ship's mast. On closer investigation they discover to their utter astonishment that the ship is of solid stone, and water is streaming down her sides. They manage to board her but, as they approach the deck house, they suddenly see something: "... a great shaggy head of red hair was rising slowly into sight, through the port window, the one nearest us."

The story continues in a similar vein as the intrepid mariners discover a succession of fearsome mysteries, which Hodgson unleashes with mas-



terful timing. His explanation for the strange events is, as in most of his stories, both plausible and satisfactory.

Few horror writers are expert at both the short story and the novel; it is difficult to sustain a growing sense of unease and dread over any great length. But Hodgson showed how it should be done. He wrote only four novels, and each is an object lesson in sustained terror.

Not surprisingly, the first was set at sea and may well have grown out of a short story as the first few chapters stand self-sufficient. *The Boats of the Glen Carrig* (1907) takes the form of an account by one of the survivors of the eponymous ship "after the foundering of the good ship Glen Carrig through striking upon a hidden rock in the unknown seas to the Southward" sometime before the year 1757. Five days after

the shipwreck the survivors reach a dismal land of mud flats and stagnant pools where the plant life is horribly human. Escaping, they encounter a savage storm and thence find themselves in the weed-choked Sargasso Sea. They succeed in penetrating as far as a small island in the midst of the weeds and discover, out to sea on the far side of the island, a wrecked ship which is apparently inhabited. The novel then follows the attempts to rescue the survivors from the derelict whilst the island itself is besieged by such horrors as the Weed Men who move like monstrous slugs and have two short stumpy arms that end in "wriggling masses of small tentacles." As a first novel, *The Boats of the Glen Carrig* is a formidable work. H. P. Lovecraft wrote that "the brooding menace in the earlier parts of the book is impossible to surpass."

Hodgson's other sea novel is *The Ghost Pirates* (1909), a more traditional tale of a doomed ship, the *Mortestus*, and its final voyage. "There's too many bloomin' shadders about this 'ere packet," warns one of the sailors to the new crew member Jessop at the start of the voyage, and before long Jessop sees for himself what the man meant.

Away aft, a dim shadowy form stood in the wake of a swaying belt of moonlight, that swept the deck a bit abaft the main-mast.

It was the same figure that I had just been attributing to my fancy. I will admit that I felt more than startled; I was quite a bit frightened. I was convinced now that it was no mere imaginary thing. It was a human figure. And yet, with the flicker of moonlight and the shadows chasing over it, I was unable to say more than that.

Hodgson's biographer, Sam Moskowitz, believes that *The Ghost Pirates* "may be the longest sustained masterpiece of a mood of horror in the English language."

Hodgson's two other novels have nothing to do with the sea, but are no less effective. *The House on the Borderland* (1908), which Lovecraft regarded as "perhaps the greatest of all Mr. Hodgson's works," is truly a

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shattering novel about a lonely house in western Ireland built at the focal point of cosmic forces. Its occupant suffers nightmare visitations and, in one Wellsian sequence, witnesses the end of the world.

The Night Land (1912), however, though initially difficult to read because of Hodgson's use of pseudo-archaic language for the full 200,000-word length of the novel, must rank as Hodgson's supreme achievement. His vision of the Earth millions of years in the future is inspired. Imagine a world where the sun is dead and night is eternal. Humanity survives in an enormous metal pyramid, the Last Redoubt. Far to the north is the House of Silence, where there "were many lights, and no sounds. And so it had been through an uncountable Eternity of Years." In the other direction is the Watching Thing of the South, "the hugest monster in all the visible Night Lands ... a living hill of watchfulness." Elsewhere are the North-West Watcher and the South-East Watcher, the Vale of Red Fire and the Plain of Blue Fire, the Road Where the Silent Ones Walk, the Thing That Nods, the Valley of the Hounds, the Headland From Which Strange Things Peer, and as many other nightmares. The narrator of the novel, a young man, ventures out from the safety of the Redoubt on a quest for a girl who resides in the legendary and very distant Lesser Redoubt and with whom he has been in telepathic contact.

In the whole of literature there is nothing like *The Night Land* for

originality, ingenuity, and creativity. (Later, for copyright reasons, Hodgson issued the book in the U.S. in an abbreviated, "fragmentary" form entitled *The Dream of X*. A new edition, illustrated by Stephen Fabian, is currently available from the publisher Donald M. Grant in West Kingston, Rhode Island.)


In 1911, Hodgson moved to London, where he pursued an active career as a writer, journalist, and reviewer. He turned to all forms of fiction, and his horror stories took a lesser role. He had earlier completed a series of mysteries about an occult investigator. Some of these were subsequently published in book form as *Carnacki, The Ghost-Finder* (1913); others remained unpublished until collected by August Derleth in 1948. Carnacki, to some extent the fictional personification of Hodgson, lives in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, where, after his investigation of each strange case, he summons his small circle of friends and relates his adventures. On the whole, the clearly derivative stories lack the intensity of Hodgson's other work. However, they do contain certain suspenseful moments—in "The Searcher of the End House" and "The Hog," for example—which are equal to Hodgson's very best writing. Carnacki tackles his cases armed with such devices as a camera and an Electric Pentacle, a powerful means of defense derived in part from a fourteenth-century Sigard Manuscript and in part from Gardner's "Experiments with a Medium!" But even this is insufficient against some of the more menacing powers of darkness.

While in London Hodgson met Bessie Farnsworth, of the same age and background as himself, and they married in February 1913. They honeymooned in France and, finding the country both agreeable and inexpensive, they settled there. In little more than a year, however, Europe was cast into war, and Hodgson and his wife returned to England. Hodgson joined the Officer Training Corps and by July 1915 had been commissioned as Lieutenant in the Royal Field Artillery. Stationed at Salisbury Plain with the task of training soldiers in the handling of horses, Hodgson, himself a first class horseman, was thrown from his mount and suffered a broken jaw and concus-

sion. So severe were the injuries that Hodgson was discharged from the army and he retired to his wife in Borth. Because of his remarkable physical fitness, Hodgson recovered, though he still suffered from bouts of disorientation.

Hodgson convinced the medical board that he was fit for active service and he re-enlisted in 1917. He was dispatched to join his division in France, and was soon in the thick of the action at Ypres in Belgium. By March 1918 the British were under pressure from a determined German offensive and Hodgson's 84th Battery was forced to retreat. On April 16, 1918, the Battery established a Forward Observation Post on Mount Kemmel and Hodgson volunteered to act as the Observation Officer. Because of the intense action that followed, much confusion has arisen over the exact circumstances surrounding Hodgson's activities and subsequent disappearance, but it has recently been established that, on or about April 19, Hodgson was hit by one of the Germans' artillery shells and instantly blown to pieces, with little more than his helmet left to mark the spot. His few earthly remains were buried where he died, at the bottom of the mountain's eastern slope. He was just forty years old.

Hodgson's work remained unrecognized for many years after his death, but such talent cannot be lost forever. Thanks to the efforts of such enthusiasts as H. C. Koenig, H. P. Lovecraft, and August Derleth in America, and Dennis Wheatley in Britain, his work was revived and is now widely available. The combination of experience, writing ability, and vivid imagination made Hodgson a unique writer. He was one of the first to hint at rational scientific explanations behind the apparent supernatural events in his stories; this makes him a natural successor to H. G. Wells and Arthur Conan Doyle. But it was his nautical background that enabled Hodgson to create his own special niche in the annals of science fiction and fantasy.

Perhaps it was best expressed by Dennis Wheatley, whose own works betray the influence of Hodgson. In his *Memoirs* he wrote: "In occult spine chillers M. R. James was excellent, but William Hope Hodgson has never been surpassed." 

The Voice in the Night

The Classic Tale of Terror on the Sea

by William Hope Hodgson

It was a dark, starless night. We were becalmed in the Northern Pacific. Our exact position I do not know; for the sun had been hidden during the course of a weary, breathless week, by a thin haze which had seemed to float above us, about the height of our mastheads, at whiles descending and shrouding the surrounding sea.

With there being no wind, we had steadied the tiller, and I was the only man on deck. The crew, consisting of two men and a boy, were sleeping forward in their den; while Will—my friend, and the master of our little craft—was aft in his bunk on the port side of the little cabin.

Suddenly, from out of the surrounding darkness, there came a hail:—

"Schooner, ahoy!"

The cry was so unexpected that I gave no immediate answer, because of my surprise.

It came again—a voice curiously throaty and inhuman, calling from somewhere upon the dark sea away on our port broadside—

"Schooner, ahoy!"

"Hullo!" I sung out, having gathered my wits somewhat. "What are you? What do you want?"

"You need not be afraid," answered the queer voice, having probably noticed some trace of confusion in my tone. "I am only an old—man."

The pause sounded oddly; but it was only afterwards that it came back to me with any significance.

"Why don't you come alongside, then?" I queried somewhat snappishly; for I liked not his hinting at my having been a trifle shaken.

"I—I—can't. It wouldn't be safe. I—" The voice broke off, and there was silence.

"What do you mean?" I asked, growing more and more astonished. "Why not safe? Where are you?"

I listened for a moment; but there came no answer. And then, a sudden indefinite suspicion, of I knew not what, coming to me, I stepped swiftly to the binnacle, and took out the lighted lamp. At the same time, I knocked on the deck with my heel to waken Will. Then I was back at the side, throwing the yellow funnel of light out into the silent immensity beyond our rail. As I did so, I heard a slight, muffled cry, and then the sound of a splash, as though some one had dipped oars abruptly. Yet I cannot say that I saw anything with certainty; save, it seemed to me, that with the first flash of the light, there had been something upon the water, where now there was nothing.

"Hullo, there!" I called. "What foolery is this!"

But there came only the indistinct sounds of a boat being pulled away into the night.

Then I heard Will's voice, from the direction of the after scuttle:—

"What's up, George?"

"Come here Will!" I said.

"What is it?" he asked, coming across the deck.

I told him the queer thing which had happened. He put several questions; then, after a moment's silence, he raised his hands to his lips, and hailed:—

"Boat, ahoy!"

From a long distance away, there came back to us a faint reply, and my companion repeated his call. Presently, after a short period of silence, there grew on our hearing the muffled sound of oars; at which Will hailed again.

This time there was a reply:—

"Put away the light."

"I'm damned if I will," I muttered; but Will told me to do as the voice bade, and I shoved it

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down under the bulwarks.

"Come nearer," he said, and the oar-strokes continued. Then, when apparently some half-dozen fathoms distant, they again ceased.

"Come alongside," exclaimed Will. "There's nothing to be frightened of aboard here!"

"Promise that you will not show the light?"

"What's to do with you," I burst out, "that you're so infernally afraid of the light?"

"Because—" began the voice, and stopped short.

"Because what?" I asked, quickly.

Will put his hand on my shoulder.

"Shut up a minute, old man," he said, in a low voice. "Let me tackle him."

He leant more over the rail.

"See here, Mister," he said, "this is a pretty queer business, you coming upon us like this, right out in the middle of the blessed Pacific. How are we to know what sort of a hanky-panky trick you're up to? You say there's only one of you. How are we to know, unless we get a squint of you—eh? What's your objection to the light, anyway?"

As he finished, I heard the noise of the oars again, and then the voice came; but now from a greater distance, and sounding extremely hopeless and pathetic.

"I am sorry—sorry! I would not have troubled you, only I am hungry, and—so is she."

The voice died away, and the sound of the oars, dipping irregularly, was borne to us.

"Stop!" sung out Will. "I don't want to drive you away. Come back! We'll keep the light hidden, if you don't like it."

He turned to me:—

"It's a damned queer rig, this; but I think there's nothing to be afraid of?"

There was a question in his tone, and I replied.

"No, I think the poor devil's been wrecked around here, and gone crazy."

The sound of the oars drew nearer.

"Shove that lamp back in the binnacle," said Will; then he leaned over the rail, and listened. I replaced the lamp, and came back to his side. The dipping of the oars ceased some dozen yards distant.

"Won't you come alongside now?" asked Will in an even voice. "I have had the lamp put back in the binnacle."

"I—I cannot," replied the voice. "I dare not come nearer. I dare not even pay you for the—the provisions."

"That's all right," said Will, and hesitated. "You're welcome to as much grub as you can take—" Again he hesitated.

"You are very good," exclaimed the voice. "May God, who understands everything, reward you—" It broke off huskily.

"The—the lady?" said Will, abruptly. "Is she—" "I have left her behind upon the island," came the voice.

"What island?" I cut in.

"I know not its name," returned the voice. "I would to God—!" it began, and checked itself as suddenly.

"Could we not send a boat for her?" asked Will at this point.

"No!" said the voice, with extraordinary emphasis. "My God! No!" There was a moment's pause; then it added, in a tone which seemed a merited reproach:—

"It was because of our want I ventured—Because her agony tortured me."

"I am a forgetful brute," exclaimed Will. "Just a minute, whoever you are, and I will bring you up something at once."

In a couple of minutes he was back again, and his arms were full of various edibles. He paused at the rail.

"Can't you come alongside for them?" he asked.

"No—I *dare not*," replied the voice, and it seemed to me that in its tones I detected a note of stifled craving—as though the owner hushed a mortal desire. It came to me then in a flash, that the poor old creature out there in the darkness, was *suffering* for actual need of that which Will held in his arms; and yet, because of some unintelligible dread, refraining from dashing to the side of our little schooner, and receiving it. And with the lightning-like conviction, there came the knowledge that the Invisible was not mad; but sanely facing some intolerable horror.

"Damn it, Will!" I said, full of many feelings, over which predominated a vast sympathy. "Get a box. We must float off the stuff to him in it."

This we did—propelling it away from the vessel, out into the darkness, by means of a boat-hook. In a minute, a slight cry from the Invisible came to us, and we knew that he had secured the box.

A little later, he called out a farewell to us, and so heartfelt a blessing that I am sure we were the better for it: Then, without more ado, we heard the ply of oars across the darkness.

"Pretty soon off," remarked Will, with per-haps just a little sense of injury.

"Wait," I replied. "I think somehow he'll come back. He must have been badly needing that food."

"And the lady," said Will. For a moment he was silent; then he continued:—

"It's the queerest thing ever I've tumbled across, since I've been fishing."

"Yes," I said, and fell to pondering.

And so the time slipped away—an hour, another, and still Will stayed with me; for the queer



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adventure had knocked all desire for sleep out of him.

The third hour was three parts through, when we heard again the sound of oars across the silent ocean.

"Listen!" said Will, a low note of excitement in his voice.

"He's coming, just as I thought," I muttered.

The dipping of the oars grew nearer, and I noted that the strokes were firmer and longer. The food had been needed.

They came to a stop a little distance off the broadside, and the queer voice came again to us through the darkness:—

"Schooner, ahoy!"

"That you?" asked Will.

"Yes," replied the voice, "I left you suddenly; but—but there was great need.

"The—lady is grateful now on earth. She will be more grateful soon in—in heaven."

Will began to make some reply, in a puzzled voice; but that became confused, and broke off short. I said nothing. I was wondering at the curious pauses, and, apart from my wonder, I was full of a great sympathy.

The voice continued:—

"We—she and I, have talked, as we shared the result of God's tenderness and yours—"

Will interposed; but without coherence.

"I beg of you not to—to belittle your deed of Christian charity this night," said the voice. "Be sure that it has not escaped His notice."

It stopped, and there was a full minute's silence. Then it came again:—

"We have spoken together upon that which—which has befallen us. We had thought to go out, without telling any, of the terror which has come into our—lives. She is with me in believing that tonight's happenings are under a special ruling, and that it is God's wish that we should tell you all that we have suffered since—since—"

"Yes?" said Will, softly.

"Since the sinking of the *Albatross*."

"Ah!" I exclaimed, involuntarily. "She left Newcastle for 'Frisco some six months ago, and hasn't been heard of since."

"Yes," answered the voice. "But some few degrees to the North of the line she was caught in a terrible storm, and dismayed. When the day came, it was found that she was leaking badly, and, presently, it falling to a calm, the sailors took to the boats, leaving—a young lady—my fiancée—and myself upon the wreck.

"We were below, gathering together a few of our belongings, when they left. They were entirely callous, through fear, and when we came up on the

decks, we saw them only as small shapes afar off upon the horizon. Yet we did not despair, but set to work and constructed a small raft. Upon this we put such few matters as it would hold, including a quantity of water and some ship's biscuit. Then, the vessel being very deep in the water, we got ourselves onto the raft, and pushed off.

"It was later, when I observed that we seemed to be in the way of some tide or current, which bore us from the ship at an angle; so that in the course of three hours, by my watch, her hull became invisible to our sight, her broken masts remaining in view for a somewhat longer period. Then, towards evening, it grew misty, and so through the night. The next day we were still encompassed by the mist, the weather remaining quiet.

"For four days, we drifted through this strange haze, until, on the evening of the fourth day, there grew upon our ears the murmur of breakers at a distance. Gradually it became plainer, and, somewhat after midnight, it appeared to sound upon either hand at no very great space. The raft was raised upon a swell several times, and then we were in smooth water, and the noise of the breakers was behind.

"When the morning came, we found that we were in a sort of great lagoon; but of this we noticed little at the time; for close behind us, through the enshrouding mist, loomed the hull of a large sailing vessel. With one accord, we fell upon our knees and thanked God; for we thought that here was an end to our perils. We had much to learn.

"The raft drew near the ship, and we shouted on them, to take us aboard; but none answered. Presently, the raft touched against the side of the vessel, and, seeing a rope hanging downwards, I seized it and began to climb. Yet I had much ado to make my way up, because of a kind of grey, lichenous fungus, which had seized upon the rope, and which blotched the side of the ship, lividly.

"I reached the rail, and clambered over it, on to the deck. Here, I saw that the decks were covered, in great patches, with the grey masses, some of them rising into nodules several feet higher in height; but at the same time, I thought less of this matter than of the possibility of there being people aboard the ship. I shouted; but none answered. Then I went to the door below the poop deck. I opened it, and peered in. There was a great smell of staleness, so that I knew in a moment that nothing living was within, and with the knowledge, I shut the door quickly; for I felt suddenly lonely.

"I went back to the side, where I had scrambled up. My—my sweetheart was still sitting quietly upon the raft. Seeing me look down, she called up to know whether there were any aboard of the ship. I replied that the vessel had the appearance

By the end of the week,
the growth had returned
in full strength, and,
in addition, it had spread
to other places . . .

On the seventh morning,
my sweetheart woke
to find a small patch of it
growing on her pillow,
close to her face.

of having been long deserted; but that if she would wait a little, I would see whether there was anything in the shape of a ladder, by which she could ascend to the deck. Then we would make a search through the vessel together. A little later, on the opposite side of the decks, I found a rope sideladder. This I carried across, and a minute afterwards, she was beside me.

"Together, we explored the cabins and apartments in the afterpart of the ship; but nowhere was there any sign of life. Here and there, within the cabins themselves, we came across odd patches of that queer fungus; but this, as my sweetheart said, could be cleansed away.

"In the end, having assured ourselves that the after portion of the vessel was empty, we picked our ways to the bows, between the ugly grey nodules of that strange growth; and here we made a further search, which told us that there was indeed none aboard but ourselves.

"This being now beyond any doubt, we returned to the stern of the ship, and proceeded to make ourselves as comfortable as possible. Together, we cleared out and cleaned two of the cabins; and, after that, I made examination whether there was anything eatable in the ship. This I soon found was so, and thanked God in my heart for His goodness. In addition to this, I discovered the whereabouts of the freshwater pump, and having fixed it, I found the water drinkable, though somewhat unpleasant to the taste.

"For several days, we stayed aboard the ship, without attempting to get to the shore. We were busily engaged in making the place habitable. Yet even thus early, we became aware that our lot was even less to be desired than might have been imagined; for though, as a first step, we scraped away the odd patches of growth that studded the floors and walls of the cabins and saloon, yet they returned to almost their original size within the space of twenty-four hours, which not only discouraged us,

but gave us a feeling of vague unease.

"Still, we would not admit ourselves beaten, so set to work afresh, and not only scraped away the fungus, but soaked the places where it had been with carbolic, a canful of which I had found in the pantry. Yet, by the end of the week, the growth had returned in full strength, and, in addition, it had spread to other places, as though our touching it had allowed germs to travel elsewhere.

"On the seventh morning, my sweetheart woke to find a small patch of it growing on her pillow, close to her face. At that, she came to me, so soon as she could get her garments upon her. I was in the galley at the time, lighting the fire for breakfast.

"'Come here, John,' she said, and led me aft. When I saw the thing upon her pillow, I shuddered, and then and there we agreed to go right out of the ship, and see whether we could not fare to make ourselves more comfortable ashore.

"Hurriedly, we gathered together our few belongings, and even among these, I found that the fungus had been at work; for one of her shawls had a little lump of it growing near one edge. I threw the whole thing over the side, without saying anything to her.

"The raft was still alongside; but it was too clumsy to guide, and I lowered down a small boat that hung across the stern, and in this we made our way to the shore. Yet, as we drew near it, I became gradually aware that here the vile fungus, which had driven us from the ship, was growing riot. In places it rose into horrible, fantastic mounds, which seemed almost to quiver, as with a quiet life, when the wind blew across them. Here and there, it took on the forms of vast fingers, and in others it just spread out flat and smooth and treacherous. Odd places, it appeared as grotesque stunted trees, seeming extraordinarily kinked and gnarled — the whole quaking vilely at times.

"At first, it seemed to us that there was no single portion of the surrounding shore which was not hidden beneath the masses of the hideous lichen; yet, in this, I found we were mistaken; for somewhat later, coasting along the shore at a little distance, we described a smooth white patch of what appeared to be fine sand, and there we landed. It was not sand. What it was, I do not know. All that I have observed, is that upon it, the fungus will not grow; while everywhere else, save where the sand-like earth wanders oddly, path-wise, amid the grey desolation of the lichen, there is nothing but that loathsome greyness.

"It is difficult to make you understand how cheered we were to find one place that was absolutely free from the growth, and here we deposited our belongings. Then we went back to the ship for such things as seemed to us we should need. Among

The Voice in the Night

other matters, I managed to bring ashore with me one of the ship's sails, with which I constructed two small tents, which, though exceedingly roughshaped, served the purposes for which they were intended. In these, we lived and stored our various necessities, and thus for a matter of some four weeks, all went smoothly and without particular unhappiness. Indeed, I may say with much of happiness—for—for we were together.

It was on the thumb of her right hand, that the growth first showed. It was only a small circular spot, much like a little grey mole. My God! how the fear leapt to my heart when she showed me the place. We cleansed it, between us, washing it with carbolic and water. In the morning of the following day, she showed her hand to me again. The grey warty thing had returned. For a little while, we looked at one another in silence. Then, still wordless, we started again to remove it. In the midst of the operation, she spoke suddenly.

"What's that on the side of your face, Dear?" Her voice was sharp with anxiety. I put my hand up to feel.

"There! Under the hair by your ear.—A little to the front a bit." My finger rested upon the place, and then I knew.

"Let us get your thumb done first," I said. And she submitted, only because she was afraid to touch me until it was cleansed. I finished washing and disinfecting her thumb, and then she turned to my face. After it was finished, we sat together and talked awhile of many things; for there had come into our lives sudden, very terrible thoughts. We were, all at once, afraid of something worse than death. We spoke of loading the boat with provisions and water, and making our way on to the sea; yet we were helpless, for many causes, and—the growth had attacked us already. We decided to stay. God would do with us what was His will. We would wait.

"A month, two months, three months passed, and the places grew somewhat, and there had come others. Yet we fought so strenuously with the fear, that its headway was but slow, comparatively speaking.

"Occasionally, we ventured off to the ship for such stores as we needed. There, we found that the fungus grew persistently. One of the nodules on the maindeck became soon as high as my head.

"We had now given up all hope of leaving the island. We realized that it would be unallowable to go among healthy humans, with the thing from which we were suffering.

"With this determination and knowledge in our minds, we knew that we should have to husband our food and water; for we did not know, at that time,

but that we should possibly live for many years.

"This reminds me that I have told you that I am an old man. Judged by years this is not so. But—but—"

He broke off; then continued somewhat abruptly:—

"As I was saying, we knew that we should have to use care in the matter of food. But we had no idea then how little food there was left, of which to take care. It was a week later, that I made the discovery that all the other bread tanks—which I had supposed full—were empty, and that (beyond odd tins of vegetables and meat, and some other matters) we had nothing on which to depend, but the bread in the tank which I had already opened.

"After learning this, I bestirred myself to do what I could, and set to work at fishing in the lagoon; but with no success. At this, I was somewhat inclined to feel desperate, until the thought came to me to try outside the lagoon, in the open sea.

"Here, at times, I caught odd fish; but, so infrequently, that they proved of but little help in keeping us from the hunger which threatened. It seemed to me that our deaths were likely to come by hunger, and by the growth of the thing which had seized upon our bodies.

"We were in this state of mind when the fourth month wore out. Then I made a very horrible discovery. One morning, a little before midday, I came off from the ship, with a portion of the biscuits which were left. In the mouth of her tent, I saw my sweetheart sitting, eating something.

"What is it, my Dear?" I called out as I leapt ashore. Yet, on hearing my voice, she seemed confused, and, turning, slyly threw something towards the edge of the little clearing. It fell short, and, a vague suspicion having arisen within me, I walked across and picked it up. It was a piece of the grey fungus.

"As I went to her, with it in my hand, she turned deadly pale; then a rose red.

"I felt strangely dazed and frightened.

"My Dear! My Dear!" I said, and could say no more. Yet, at my words, she broke down and cried bitterly. Gradually, as she calmed, I get her the news that she had tried it the preceding day, and—and liked it. I got her to promise on her knees not to touch it again, however great our hunger. After she had promised, she told me that the desire for it had come suddenly, and that, until the moment of desire, she had experienced nothing towards it, but the most extreme repulsion.

"Later in the day, feeling strangely restless, and much shaken with the thing which I had discovered, I made my way along one of the twisted paths—formed by the white, sand-like substance—which led among the fungoid growth: I had,



once before, ventured along there; but not to any great distance. This time, being involved in perplexing thought, I went much further than hitherto.

"Suddenly, I was called to myself, by a queer hoarse sound on my left. Turning quickly, I saw that there was movement among an extraordinarily shaped mass of fungus, close to my elbow. It was swaying uneasily, as though it possessed life of its own. Abruptly, as I stared, the thought came to me that the thing had a grotesque resemblance to the figure of a distorted human creature. Even as the fancy flashed into my brain, there was a slight sickening noise of tearing, and I saw that one of the branch-like arms was detaching itself from the surrounding grey masses and coming towards me. The head of the thing—a shapeless grey ball, inclined in my direction. I stood stupidly, and the vile arm brushed across my face. I gave out a frightened cry, and ran back a few paces. There was a sweetish taste upon my lips, where the thing had touched me. I licked them, and was immediately filled with an inhuman desire. I turned and seized a mass of the fungus. Then more, and—more. I was insatiable. In the midst of the devouring, the remembrance of the

morning's discovery swept into my mazed brain. It was sent by God. I dashed the fragment I held, to the ground. Then, utterly wretched and feeling a dreadful guiltiness, I made my way back to the little encampment.

"I think she knew, by some marvelous intuition which love must have given, so soon as she set eyes on me. Her quiet sympathy made it easier for me, and I told her of my sudden weakness; yet omitted to mention the extraordinary thing which had gone before. I desired to spare her all unnecessary terror.

"But, for myself, I had added an intolerable knowledge, to breed an incessant terror in my brain; for I doubted not but that I had seen the end of one of those men who had come to the island in the ship in the lagoon; and in that monstrous ending, I had seen our own.

"Thereafter, we kept from the abominable food, though the desire for it had entered into our blood. Yet, our drear punishment was upon us; for, day by day, with monstrous rapidity, the fungoid growth took hold of our poor bodies. Nothing we could do would check it materially, and so—and so—we who had been human, became—Well, it matters less each day. Only—only we had been man and maid!

"And day by day, the fight is more dreadful, to withstand the hunger-lust, for the terrible lichen.

"A week ago we ate the last of the biscuit, and since that time I have caught three fish. I was out here fishing tonight, when your schooner drifted upon me out of the mist. I hailed you. You know the rest, and may God, out of His great heart, bless you for your goodness to a—couple of poor outcast souls."

There was the dip of an oar—another. Then the voice came again, and for the last time, sounding through the slight surrounding mist, ghostly and mournful.

"God bless you! Good-bye!"

"Good-bye," we shouted together, hoarsely, our hearts full of many emotions.

I glanced about me. I became aware that the dawn was upon us.

The sun flung a stray beam across the hidden sea; pierced the mist dully, and lit up the receding boat with a gloomy fire. Indistinctly, I saw something nodding between the oars. I thought of a sponge—a great, grey nodding sponge—The oars continued to ply. They were grey—as was the boat—and my eyes searched a moment vainly for the conjunction of hand and oar. My gaze flashed back to the—head. It nodded forward as the oars went backward for the stroke. Then the oars were dipped, the boat shot out of the patch of light, and the—the thing went nodding into the mist. 17

Snakes & Ladders

by Ramsey Campbell

THEY CALLED IT A GAME—BUT THERE WEREN'T ANY WINNERS,
AND THE PENALTY FOR LOSING WAS DEATH.

The shop was totally silent. Even the man who had beckoned Booth in managed to pad back to his place without making a sound. Thick curtains were tight at the window. The sole light came from a candle waxed to the table set in the middle of the floor, between the counters.

The woman who stood behind the table ignored Booth; so did most of the dozen watchers. But the old man lying on a mattress before the table, his knees drawn up by arthritis, turned his head painfully on its worn-out neck as Booth tried to tiptoe in. The boards caught Booth's footsteps, reverberating them hollowly.

When you enter Mrs. Cooper's toy shop, you step into a world of faith and magic, Booth scribbled in his mind, defensively. But is the magic real?

At the table Mrs. Cooper waited patiently for silence, waited for Booth's last movements to fade. She waited while the whistle of the ferry on the nearby river trailed away; even the lapping of the canal at the edge of the street was closed out by the curtains. Then she opened the drawer of the table and took out a doll, whose flat face she touched to the old man's forehead. She held it there for minutes, as if she were holding the taut silence still, challenging it to break. Even the candle's flame streamed up true. The old man's face wizened with intentness, and a tear squeezed out beneath one eyelid.

Without moving his head, Booth glanced at the watchers. An awkward red-faced girl, a middle-aged man leaning pugnaciously forward over a walking stick, a woman weeping with hope; behind them dim chessmen stared palely through glass. The two people who had turned when he'd entered were still watching him.

One was an enormous woman whose breasts, sucked out of shape, had been forced into an almost colorless flowered dress, along with her belly and hips. Each breath strained at the dress above the swollen legs, as if against suffocation, yet her eyes

were alert. The other was a broad man, uncomfortably tall; above the lit chin his face was a dark blank that watched Booth steadily. *Despite the atmosphere of the shop, Booth thought, you soon begin to suspect that you're meant to be impressed.*

Mrs. Cooper was holding the doll above the old man's glimmering eyes. Very slowly, tenderly, she straightened the doll's bent legs. The old man's hands gripped the edge of the mattress, trembling. His left foot began to quiver. It shook violently, straining to reach the end of the mattress. It worked within his shoe, nails scraping; it inched forward, quivering; it reached the floor. He was struggling to rise. The pugnacious man hurried to offer his stick. The old man stumbled limping on his left leg toward the weeping woman. At once, as if at the end of a play, the lights came on.

The shop was smaller than its darkness had seemed. It was full of the table, three glass counters full of toys and games, the dozen people clustering about the old man. Booth could hardly side his way to the table. Mrs. Cooper was scraping drops of wax from the wood.

"I'd like to ask you a few questions," Booth said.

"I'm sorry." Her voice was thin and high, not at all commanding. But her eyes held the conviction her voice lacked; her gaze was neither challenging nor defiant, but completely sure. "You've seen all there is," she said. "I can't add anything to that."

"I must have some background."

"There is none." She turned as the red-faced girl—clearly her daughter—whispered to her, and Booth knew he'd been dismissed.

The enormous woman plodded up, beaming. "She's a miracle, isn't she?" she demanded of Booth.

He glanced about at the chessmen, the board games, the dolls: all Mrs. Cooper's work. There was a board game lying half-painted on one counter. "She's very talented," he said.

"What are you going to say about her in your

"I'm retired. But I haven't forgotten what I knew."

"Well, thank you," Booth said, nodding to Mrs. Cooper, and pulled at the handle. The door rattled, but refused to yield. He tugged at the handle; sweat trickled over him, prickling. This was the last time he'd follow up a story phoned in by the public.

The door pulled free of the obstruction; but as it moved, fingers closed fatly on his wrist. "Not so fast," the woman said. "You're going to say she's a miracle, aren't you? The last one who lied about her found out what else she can make happen."

Booth's control broke. He threw her off and pushed her back into the shop. "I'll say nothing of the kind," he said viciously. "I'll say this looks to me like a fake, set up to exploit the gullible and desperate."

He wrenched open his car door and thrust the key into the ignition. As the engine started, he looked back. They were hurrying out of the shop a dozen yards away, running to close in on the car from both sides. The girl Bernadette had picked up a handful of litter and was poised to throw it at the car. Booth fumbled hastily with the gears. The girl's hand went back. The car leapt, accelerating wildly. But his hand had slipped on the lever. The car was accelerating in reverse.

No, this wasn't happening. The girl Bernadette hurtled toward him in the mirror; she looked like a picture on a tiny screen, unreal. But he heard the dull thud, and felt the rear wheels buck. As he braked convulsively, the enormous woman stumped quaking past the car and stood in its way.

Surely she didn't expect him to flee. He pushed himself out of the car and peered down. The girl was lying beneath the car, her neck broken; she stared blindly toward him, slack-mouthed and drooling blood. Mrs. Cooper straightened up from her daughter's body and gazed expressionlessly at him. Then she paced deliberately back to the shop, walking steadily, erect, purposeful. When she halted in the doorway, Booth turned to the others. Only his movement saved his hand as the pugnacious man kicked the car door shut.

"Now wait," Booth said. "It wasn't my fault. She distracted me."

Half of them were blocking the street behind the car, while ahead the enormous woman waited for him, arms spread. The old man leaned against the shop window, bewildered. The rest of them were closing around Booth as he backed away from the pugnacious man. The doctor strode slowly toward him, arms rising from his towering shoulders.

Booth saw escape, and leapt. He vaulted over the car's hood, skinning his elbow on the windshield.

He rolled over the metal, then was running. He reached the bridge over the canal beside the street before they could stop him. Ahead, beyond the warehouses, were the docks. Through the docks he could reach the ferry.

The railing of the bridge scraped between his fingers, shedding rust. On the cobbled pavement before the warehouses, he glared back. They hadn't followed him. The canal slopped over his feet. His pursuers had returned to the shop doorway and were conferring with Mrs. Cooper. With a shock Booth realized that he'd left his key in the ignition. Still, they could have the car. He was too glad of his escape.

To his right the canal curved round at the end of the line of warehouses, leading the street to the ferry's landing stage. There might be other bridges back to the street, but if he could reach them, so could his pursuers. He was sure his first instinct had been right: he must go through the docks. Ahead was an alley, a dark crack between the warehouses. He ran forward.

He'd thought the alley must be wider than it looked, but it was hardly an alley at all—more a gap. The dark cold stone loomed over him, almost touching his shoulders, blinding him at once. It was as though he were being led blindfold by captors that paced him relentlessly, close and alert in case he tried to flee. He ran, trying to outdistance panic, hands outstretched to save him if he tripped. Around him, against him, his footsteps clapped.

He made out a pool of light ahead, lying stranded on the floor of the alley. It had splashed up a side alley, which finished where it joined his. At the far end of the side alley he could see the canal; its light struggled feebly between the alley walls, trapped. He hurried on, faster now that he could see the next gleam ahead.

The dead girl's face hung in his mind. It was Mrs. Cooper's fault; it had been her game. She could have called off her friend and let him go, she could certainly have called off her daughter. But it was all a game to her, he was sure. An ingenious one: he admired the way the old man hadn't been entirely cured, to make it more convincing, as though her results were only approximate.

He ran across the gleam; at the end of his path he could see the water of a dock. The old man must have been a considerable actor, and the weeping woman too. And why not? Out-of-work actors, that was all. The key to Mrs. Cooper was the games that filled the shop. He found himself trying to remember what the half-painted game had been. But the walls fell back. He was at the dock.

The water stretched before him, dimly lit by glimpses of moon that squeezed out between gray clouds. It swayed sluggishly; in the middle he could

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see the moon, a dull whitish underwater movement. The water was penned on three sides by a warehouse, a single five-story bracket-shaped building. A few hundred yards beyond the mouth of the dock, a ferry was tying up at the landing stage.

Booth began to hurry along the pavement of the dock, as fast as he dared. Water sprang up the stone with a flat smack, pooling toward his feet, draining away, glistening. He'd seen a bridge for vehicles linking the far side of the dock to the road near the landing stage. There was no sign of pursuit. In any case, there would be people at the landing stage; his pursuers wouldn't dare touch him.

He had reached the second side of the dock when he heard a wallowing, like the sound of oars. Had they followed him by water? But there was nothing on the water; even the drowned moon had gone, though in the sky it had fought off the clouds. He must have heard fish. He hurried on, faster, faster, and almost fell through a gap in the pavement.

It was at least six yards wide, and as broad as the pavement. Dim water slapped the jagged stone. Peering, he made out a crane beneath the water at the side of the dock, quivering like jelly. It must have torn free, taking the pavement with it. Glancing desperately about, he saw that the dock was disused.

He couldn't cross here. He might try to make his way through the warehouse. But he gazed at the thick walls, their massiveness merely accentuated by dozens of square lightless holes, and knew he couldn't. There was something about the place that made him dread the darkness within; something about the rocking of the dark water, the whitish gleams that swelled and thinned to threads beneath the ripples. He ran back to the alley.

He started uncontrollably when he saw, beneath the water near the alley, a length of piping as stout as a man, exactly the color of the drowned moon. When he'd seen the moon moving underwater he had been standing here, yet there was no sign of it now. Distracted, he stumbled toward the alley. As he plunged between the walls he saw the ferry, smoothly riding its inversion across the river.

He halted, panting, on the first gleam. He

stared down the side alley, but could see no bridge. He might lose himself time in searching for one. In fact, he thought, his pursuers might have headed that way. They certainly seemed to have lost him. Perhaps now he could reach his car.

He was between the gleams when he heard the wallowing again. This time it sounded like someone emerging hugely from a bath. He faltered, then hurried on; it couldn't be anything to do with him, any more than the sound he could hear now of something—an enormous sack, he thought—being dragged intermittently over stone. Someone unloading in a nearby dock, he thought: it must be the acoustics of the alleys that made it sound so close. He glanced down the second side alley, and gasped.

It was all right. Anything would be a shock in this dimness. But he was sure he hadn't seen it when he'd passed here before—a row of whitish tires at the far end of the alley, stacked together like a pipe. In the flapping reflected light they seemed to shift restlessly. He shook his head violently and ran to the end of the main alley, dragging the walls back with his hands. Three of his pursuers were waiting for him.

The enormous woman, the doctor, the pug-nacious man: they were standing just beyond the bridge. They'd known he couldn't escape through the dock. They came alert when he emerged, but made no further move. Behind them, framed in the shop window, Booth saw Mrs. Cooper sitting at the table, painting by candlelight. He knew at once she was finishing her half-finished game.

Her disinterest terrified him. He was being trapped on her behalf, yet she wasn't even bothering to watch. It was inhuman. But his pursuers, he thought, were human. "Listen here, doctor," he said, stepping forward. He fell back at once, for the gangling man had loped forward onto the bridge, arms spread eagerly, while his companions blocked the way behind him.

Frantic, Booth gazed down the canal. The meager light from the street lay in it like mud, moonlight trickled over the ripples. The rest of his pursuers had reached a bridge for vehicles, and were coming back along the cobbled pavement on his side of the canal. If he made a run in the other direction, even if there were a bridge one of the three people opposite him could head him off—the long-legged doctor, no doubt. He was trapped.

His fist clenched on an iron rung. As if she felt his terror, Mrs. Cooper looked up and gazed at him, over the empty street. The old man and the dead girl had gone. Keeping her gaze on Booth, she painted a last detail. Then she came to the shop doorway and stood watching. She had won.

Snakes & Ladders

The cold iron dug into Booth's palm, and he realized that the ladder led to the warehouse roof.

The roof was flat. He'd seen that from the dock. If the roof were whole, if the ladder held, if there were a ladder for him to descend on the far side of the dock, he could reach the landing stage. It was his only chance. He heard the rapid clattering of his pursuers drawing close; somewhere nearby he heard the moist intermittent dragging make a final surge, and halt. He tugged at the rung. He braced his heels against the wall, and pulled. The ladder held. At once, silencing his fears, he began to climb.

A few rungs up, he twisted about to see what his pursuers were doing. Mrs. Cooper was still in the doorway, gazing at him. The three at the bridge were approaching leisurely; the others continued to run. He almost lost his hold, and swung back, his blood throbbing wildly. But the ladder hadn't shifted at all. It would hold. He had won after all.

He climbed swiftly. He felt the ground fall away beneath him. There was nothing to fear, so long as he held on. No doubt Mrs. Cooper expected the ladder to part rustily from the wall. No doubt her friends were expecting that too, or perhaps they

were waiting for him to lose his head for heights. Let them wait. He might have been nervous in the shop, but he had no time to be nervous now.

He was nearly there. He glanced up. The sky swam grayly; the wall sailed free in space. He closed his eyes, gasping, and the wind tugged at him, at the same time dragging at something on the roof. Nothing to fear. He'd seen the iron handholds at the top of the wall. Take it slowly. They couldn't reach him now.

He grasped the holds and rested for a moment, eyes shut. He wouldn't take the ferry. He would telephone the police from the landing stage. Let Mrs. Cooper try to blame him for her daughter's death then. The police might well be interested in her deceptions. She'd played her last game for a while, he thought, smiling. At once he remembered what the half-finished game had been: snakes and ladders. He hoped she'd appreciate how lucky she was to have had the time to finish it.

He was still resting at the top of the ladder when the moon-colored fat-lipped mouth, puckered wide as its body and wider than his head, stooped toward him. **17**

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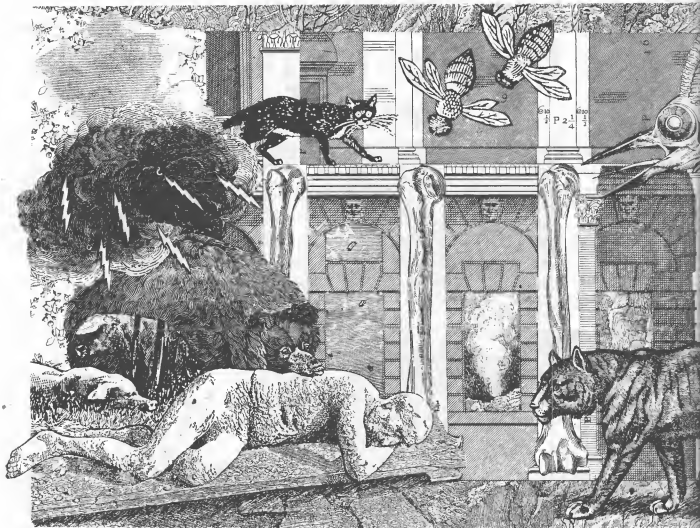
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Djinn, No Chaser

by
Harlan Ellison

ELLISON LAUNCHED TZ'S PREMIER ISSUE WITH A STORY ABOUT THE HOLY GRAIL. NOW HE RETURNS, IN A DISTINCTLY LIGHTER VEIN, WITH THIS TALE ABOUT A CERTAIN MAGIC LAMP . . .

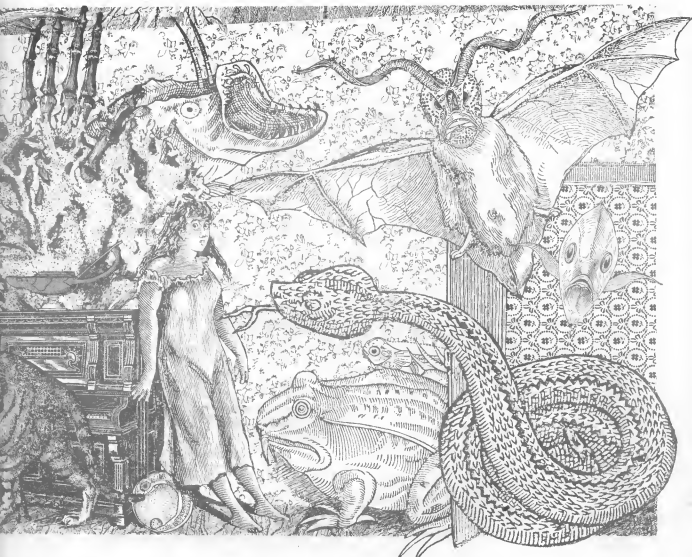
Who the hell ever heard of Turkish Period?" Danny Squires said. He said it at the top of his voice, on a city street.

"Danny! People are staring at us; lower your voice!" Connie Squires punched his bicep. They stood on the street, in front of the furniture store. Danny was determined not to enter.

"Come on, Connie," he said, "let's get away

from these junk shops and go see some inexpensive modern stuff. You know perfectly well that I don't make enough to start filling the apartment with expensive antiques."

Connie furtively looked up and down the street—she was more concerned with a "scene" than with the argument itself—and then moved in toward Danny with a determined air. "Now listen up, Squires.



Did you or did you *not* marry me four days ago, and promise to love, honor, and cherish and all that other good jive?"

Danny's blue eyes rolled toward Heaven; he knew he was losing ground. Instinctively defensive, he answered, "Well, sure, Connie, but—"

"Well, then, I am your wife, and you have not taken me on a honeymoon—"

"I can't *afford* one!"

"—have not taken me on a honeymoon," Connie repeated with inflexibility. "Consequently, we will buy a little furniture for that rabbit hutch you laughingly call our little love nest. And *little* is hardly the term: that vale of tears was criminally undersized when Barbara Fritchie hung out her flag.

"So to make my life *bearable*, for the next few weeks, till we can talk Mr. Upjohn into giving you a raise—"

"Upjohn!" Danny fairly screamed. "You've got to stay away from the boss, Connie. Don't screw around. He won't give me a raise, and I'd rather you stayed away from him—"

"Until then," she went on relentlessly, "we will decorate our apartment in the style I've wanted for years."

"Turkish Period?"

"Turkish Period."

Danny flipped his hands in the air. What was the use? He had known Connie was strong-willed when he'd married her.

It had seemed an attractive quality at the time; now he wasn't so sure. But he was strong-willed too; he was sure he could outlast her. Probably.

"Okay," he said finally, "I suppose Turkish Period it'll be. What the hell is Turkish Period?"

She took his arm lovingly, and turned him around to look in the store window. "Well, honey, it's not *actually* Turkish. It's more Mesopotamian. You know, teak and silk and ..."

"Sounds hideous."

"So you're starting up again!" She dropped his arm, her eyes flashing, her mouth a tight little line. "I'm really ashamed of you, depriving me of the few little pleasures I need to make my life a blub, sniff, hoo-hoo ..."

The edge was hers.

"Connie ... Connie ..." She knocked away his comforting hand, saying, "You beast." That was too much for him. The words were so obviously put-on, he was suddenly infuriated:

"Now, goddammit!"

Her tears came faster. Danny stood there, furi-

Djinn, No Chaser

ous, helpless, outmaneuvered, hoping desperately that no cop would come along and say, "This guy botherin' ya, lady?"

"Connie, okay, okay, we'll have Turkish Period. Come on, come on. It doesn't matter what it costs, I can scrape up the money somehow."

It was not one of the glass-brick and onyx emporia where sensible furniture might be found (if one searched hard enough and paid high enough and retained one's senses long enough as they were trying to palm off modernistic nightmares in which no comfortable position might be found); no, it was not even one of those. This was an antique shop.

They looked at beds that had canopies and ornate metalwork on the bedposts. They looked at rugs that were littered with pillows, so visitors could sit on the floors. They looked at tables built six inches off the floor, for low banquets. They inspected incense burners and hookahs and coffers and giant vases until Danny's head swam with visions of the courts of long-dead caliphs.

Yet, despite her determination, Connie chose very few items; and those she did select were moderately priced and quite handsome . . . for what they were. And as the hours passed, and as they moved around town from one dismal junk emporium to another, Danny's respect for his wife's taste grew. She was selecting an apartment full of furniture that wasn't bad at all.

They were finished by six o'clock, and had bills of sale that totaled just under two hundred dollars. Exactly thirty dollars less than Danny had decided could be spent to furnish the new household . . . and still survive on his salary. He had taken the money from his spavined savings account, and had known he must eventually start buying on credit, or they would not be able to get enough furniture to start living properly.

He was tired, but content. She'd shopped wisely. They were in a shabby section of town. How had they gotten there? They walked past an empty lot sandwiched in between two tenements—wet-wash slapping on lines between them. The lot was weed overgrown and garbage strewn.

"May I call your attention to the depressing surroundings and my exhaustion?" Danny said. "Let's get a cab and go back to the apartment. I want to collapse."

They turned around to look for a cab, and the empty lot was gone.

In its place, sandwiched between the two tenements, was a little shop. It was a one-storey affair, with a dingy facade, and its front window completely grayed over with dust. A hand-painted line of elaborate script on the glass panel of the door, also opaque with grime, proclaimed: MOHANADUS

MUKHAR, CURIOS.

A little man in a flowing robe, wearing a fez, plunged out the front door, skidded to a stop, whirled and slapped a huge sign on the window. He swiped at it four times with a big paste-brush, sticking it to the glass, and whirled back inside, slamming the door.

"No," Danny said.

Connie's mouth was making peculiar sounds.

"There's no insanity in my family," Danny said firmly. "We come from very good stock."

"We've made a small visual error," Connie said.

"Simply didn't notice it," Danny said. His usually baritone voice was much nearer soprano.

"If there's crazy, we've both got it," Connie said.

"Must be, if you see the same thing I see."

Connie was silent a moment, then said, "Large seagoing vessel, three stacks, maybe the Titanic. Flamingo on the bridge, flying the flag of Lichtenstein!"

"Don't play with me, woman," Danny whimpered. "I think I'm losing it."

She nodded soberly. "Right. Empty lot?"

He nodded back. "Empty lot. Clothesline, weeds, garbage."

"Right."

He pointed at the little store. "Little store?"

"Right."

"Man in a fez, name of Mukhar?"

She rolled her eyes. "Right."

"So why are we walking toward it?"

"Isn't this what always happens in stories where weird shops suddenly appear out of nowhere? Something inexorable draws the innocent bystanders into its grip?"

They stood in front of the grungy little shop. They read the sign. It said:

BIG SALE! HURRY! NOW! QUICK!

"The word *unnatural* comes to mind," Danny said.

"Nervously," Connie said, "she turned the knob and opened the door."

A tiny bell went tinkle-tinkle, and they stepped across the threshold into Mohanadus Mukhar's shop.

"Probably not the smartest move we've ever made," Danny said softly. The door closed behind them without any assistance.

It was cool and musty in the shop, and strange fragrances chased one another past their noses.

They looked around carefully. The shop was loaded with junk. From floor to ceiling, wall to wall, on tables and in heaps, the place was filled with oddities and bric-a-brac. Piles of things tumbled over each other on the floor; heaps of things leaned against the walls. There was barely room to walk down the aisle between the stacks and mounds of

It was algae-green with tarnish, brown with rust, and completely covered by the soot and debris of centuries. There was no contesting its antiquity; nothing so time-corrupted could fail to be authentic.

things. Things in all shapes, things in all sizes and colors. Things. They tried to separate the individual items from the jumble of the place, but all they could perceive was stuff . . . things! Stuff and flotsam and bits and junk.

"Curios, effendi," a voice said, by way of explanation.

Connie leaped in the air, and came down on Danny's foot.

Mukhar was standing beside such a pile of tumbled miscellany that for a moment they could not separate him from the stuff, junk, things he sold.

"We saw your sign," Connie said.

But Danny was more blunt, more direct. "There was an empty lot here; then a minute later, this shop. How come?"

The little man stepped out from the mounds of dust-collectors and his little nut-brown, wrinkled face burst into a million-creased smile. "A fortuitous accident, my children. A slight worn spot in the fabric of the cosmos, and I have been set down here for . . . how long I do not know. But it never hurts to try and stimulate business while I'm here."

"Uh, yeah," Danny said. He looked at Connie. Her expression was as blank as his own.

"Oh!" Connie cried, and went dashing off into one of the side corridors lined with curios. "This is perfect! Just what we need for the end table. Oh, Danny, it's a dream! It's absolutely the *ne plus ultra*!"

Danny walked over to her, but in the dimness of the aisle between the curios he could barely make out what it was she was holding. He drew her into the light near the door. It had to be:

Aladdin's lamp.

Well, perhaps not that particular person's lamp, but one of the ancient, vile-smelling oil burning jobs: long thin spout, round-bottom body, wide, flaring handle.

It was algae-green with tarnish, brown with rust, and completely covered by the soot and debris of centuries. There was no contesting its antiquity; nothing so time-corrupted could fail to be authentic. "What the hell do you want with that old thing, Connie?

"But Danny, it's so *per-fect*. If we just shine it up a bit. As soon as we put a little work into this lamp, it'll be a beauty." Danny knew he was defeated . . . and she'd probably be right, too. It probably would be very handsome when shined and brassed up.

"How much?" he asked Mukhar. He didn't want to seem anxious; old camel traders were merciless at bargaining when they knew an item in question was hotly desired.

"Fifty drachmae, eh?" the old man said. His tone was one of malicious humor. "At current exchange rates, taking into account the fall of the Ottoman Empire, thirty dollars."

Danny's lips thinned. "Put it down, Connie; let's get out of here."

He started toward the door, dragging his wife behind him. But she still clutched the lamp; and Mukhar's voice halted them. "All right, noble sir. You are a cunning shopper, I can see that. You know a bargain when you spy it. But I am unfamiliar in this time-frame with your dollars and your strange fast-food native customs, having been set down here only once before; and since I am more at ease with the drachma than the dollar, with the shekel than the cent, I will cut my own throat, slash both my wrists, and offer you this magnificent antiquity for . . . uh . . . twenty dollars?" His voice was querulous, his tone one of wonder and hope.

"Jesse James at least had a horse!" Danny snarled, once again moving toward the door.

"Fifteen!" Mukhar yowled. "And may all your children need corrective lenses from too much tv time!"

"Five; and may a hundred thousand syphilitic camels puke into your couscous," Danny screamed back over his shoulder.

"Not bad," said Mukhar.

"Thanks," said Danny, stifling a smile. Now he waited.

"Bloodsucker! Heartless trafficker in cheapness! Pimple on the fundament of decency! Graffiti on the subway car of life! Thirteen; my last offer; and may the gods of ITT and Bank of America turn a blind eye to your venality!" But his eyes held the golden gleam of the born haggler, at last, blessedly, in his element.

"Seven, not a penny more, you Arabic anathema! And may a weighty object drop from a great height, flattening you to the niggardly thickness of your soul." Connie stared at him with open awe and admiration.

"Eleven! Eleven dollars, a pittance, an outright theft we're talking about. Call the security guards, get a consumer advocate, gimme a break here!"

"My shadow will vanish from before the evil gleam of your rapacious gaze before I pay a penny

more than six bucks, and let the word go out to every wadi and oasis across the limitless desert, that Mohanadus Mukhar steals maggots from diseased meat, flies from horse dung, and the hard-earned drachmae of honest laborers. Six, and that's it!"

"My death is about to become a reality," the Arab bellowed, tearing at the strands of white hair showing under the fez. "Rob me, go ahead, rob me; drink my life's blood! Ten! A twenty-dollar loss I'll take."

"Okay, okay." Danny turned around and produced his wallet. He pulled out one of the three ten-dollar bills still inside and, turning to Connie, said, "You sure you want this ugly, dirty piece of crap?" She nodded, and he held the bill naked in the vicinity of the little merchant. For the first time Danny realized Mukhar was wearing pointed slippers that curled up; there was hair growing from his ears.

"Ten bucks."

The little man moved with the agility of a ferret, and whisked the tenner from Danny's outstretched hand before he could draw it back. "Sold!" Mukhar chuckled.

He spun around once, and when he faced them again, the ten dollars was out of sight. "And a steal, though Allah be the wiser; a hot deal, a veritable steal, blessed sir!"

Danny abruptly realized he had been taken. The lamp had probably been picked up in a junkyard and was worthless. He started to ask if it was a genuine antique, but the piles of junk had begun to waver and shimmer and coruscate with light. "Hey!" Danny said, alarmed, "What's this now?"

The little man's wrinkled face drew up in panic. "Out! Get out, quick! The time-frame is sucking back together! Out! Get out now if you don't want to roam the eternities with me and this shop ... and I can't afford any help! Out!"

He shoved them forward, and Connie slipped and fell, flailing into a pile of glassware. None of it broke. Her hand went out to protect herself and went right through the glass. Danny dragged her to her feet, panic sweeping over him ... as the shop continued to waver and grow more indistinct around them.

"Out! Out! Out!" Mukhar kept yelling.

Then they were at the door, and he was kicking them—literally planting his curl-slipped foot in Danny's backside and shoving—from the store. They landed in a heap on the sidewalk. The lamp bounced from Connie's hand and went into the gutter with a clang. The little man stood there grinning in the doorway, and as the shop faded and disappeared, they heard him mumble happily, "A clear ninety-five profit. What a lemon! You got an Edsel, kid, a real lame piece of goods. But I gotta give it to you; the syphilitic camel bit was inspired."

Then the shop was gone, and they got to their feet in front of an empty, weed-overgrown lot.

A lame piece of goods?

"Are you asleep?"

"Yes."

"How come you're answering me?"

"I was raised polite."

"Danny, talk to me ... come on!"

"The answer is no. I'm not going to talk about it."

"We have to!"

"Not only don't we have to, I don't want to, ain't *going* to, and shut up so I can go to sleep."

"We've been lying here almost an hour. Neither one of us can sleep. We have to discuss it, Danny."

The light went on over his side of the bed. The single pool of illumination spread from the hand-me-down daybed they had gotten from Danny's brother in New Jersey, faintly limning the few packing crates full of dishes and linens, the three Cuisinarts they'd gotten as wedding gifts, the straight-back chairs from Connie's Aunt Medora, the entire bare and depressing reality of their first home together.

It would be better when the furniture they'd bought today was delivered. Later, it would be better. Now, it was the sort of urban landscape that drove divorcees and aging bachelors to jump down the airstair at Christmastime.

"I'm going to talk about it, Squires."

"So talk. I have my thumbs in my ears."

"I think we should rub it."

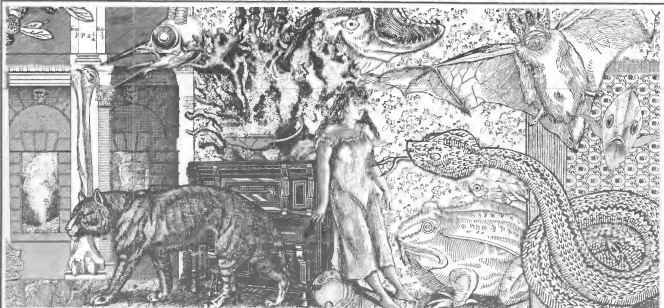
"I can't hear you. It never happened. I deny the evidence of my senses. It never happened. I have these thumbs in my ears so I cannot hear a syllable of this craziness."

"For God's sake, Squires, I was *there* with you today. I saw it happen, the same as you. I saw that weird little old man and I saw his funky shop come and go like a big burp. Now, neither of us can deny it!"

"If I could hear you, I'd agree; and then I'd deny the evidence of my senses and tell you ..." He took his thumbs from his ears, looking distressed. "... tell you with all my heart that I love you, that I have loved you since the moment I saw you in the typing pool at Upjohn, that if I live to be a hundred thousand years old I'll never love anyone or anything as much as I love you this very moment; and then I would tell you to fuck off and forget it, and let me go to sleep so that tomorrow I can con myself into believing it never happened the way I know it happened. Okay?"

She threw back the covers and got out of bed. She was naked. They had not been married that long.

"Where are you going?"



"You know where I'm going."

He sat up in the daybed. His voice had no lightness in it. "Connie!"

She stopped and stared at him, there in the light.

He spoke softly. "Don't. I'm scared. Please don't."

She said nothing. She looked at him for a time. Then, naked, she sat down cross-legged on the floor at the foot of the daybed. She looked around at what little they had, and she answered him gently. "I have to, Danny. I just have to ... if there's a chance; I have to."

They sat that way, reaching across the abyss with silent imperatives, until—finally—Danny nodded, exhaled heavily, and got out of the daybed. He walked to one of the cartons, pulled out a dustrag, shook it clean over the box, and handed it to her. He walked over to the window ledge where the tarnished and rusted oil lamp sat, and he brought it to her.

"Shine the damned thing, Squires. Who knows, maybe we actually got ourselves a twenty-four-carat genie. Shine on, oh mistress of my Mesopotamian mansion."

She held the lamp in one hand, the rag in the other. For a few minutes she did not bring them together. "I'm scared, too," she said, held her breath, and briskly rubbed the belly of the lamp.

Under her flying fingers the rust and tarnish began to come away in spots. "We'll need brass polish to do this right," she said; but suddenly the ruin covering the lamp melted away, and she was rubbing the bright skin of the lamp itself.

"Oh, Danny, look how nice it is, underneath all the crud!" And at that precise instant the lamp jumped from her hand, emitted a sharp, gray puff of smoke, and a monstrous voice bellowed out in the apartment:

AH-HA! It screamed, louder than a subway train. AH-HA!

FREE AT LAST! FREE—AS FREE AS I'LL EVER BE—AFTER TEN THOUSAND YEARS! FREE TO SPEAK AND ACT, MY WILL TO BE KNOWN!

Danny went over backward. The sound was as mind-throttling as being at ground zero. The window glass blew out. Every light bulb in the apartment shattered. From the carton containing their meager chinaware came the distinct sound of hailstones as every plate and cup dissolved into shards. Dogs and cats blocks away began to howl. Connie screamed—though it could not be heard over the foghorn thunder of the voice—and was knocked head over ankles into a corner, still clutching the dustrag. Plaster showered down on the little apartment. The window shades rolled up.

Danny recovered first. He crawled over a chair and stared at the lamp with horror. Connie sat up in the corner, face white, eyes huge, hands over her ears. Danny stood up and looked down at the seemingly innocuous lamp.

"Knock off that noise! You want us to lose the lease?"

CERTAINLY, OFFSPRING OF A WORM!

"I said: stop that goddamn bellowing!"

THIS WHISPER? THIS IS AS NAUGHT TO THE HURRICANE I SHALL LOOSE, SPAWN OF PARAMECIUM!

"That's it," Danny yelled. "I'm not getting kicked out of the only apartment in the city of New York I can afford just because of some loudmouthed genie in a jug ..."

He stopped. He looked at Connie. Connie looked at him.

"Oh, my God," she said.

"It's real," he said.

They got to their knees and crawled over. The lamp lay on its side on the floor at the foot of the daybed.

"Are you really in there?" Connie asked.

WHERE ELSE WOULD I BE, SLUT!

"Hey, you can't talk to my wife that way—"

Connie shushed him. "If he's a genie, he can talk any way he likes. Sticks and stones; name-calling is better than poverty."

"Yeah? Well, *nobody* talks to my—"

"Put a lid on it, Squires. I can take care of myself. If what's in this lamp is even half the size of

Djinn, No Chaser

the genie in that movie you took me to the Thalia to see . . ."

"*The Thief of Bagdad* . . . 1940 version . . . but Rex Ingram was just an actor, they only made him look big."

"Even so. As big as he was, if this genie is only half that big, playing macho overprotective chauvinist hubby—"

SO HUMANS CONTINUE TO PRATTLE LIKE MONKEYS EVEN AFTER TEN THOUSAND YEARS! WILL NOTHING CLEANSE THE EARTH OF THIS RAUCOUS PLAGUE OF INSECTS?

"We're going to get thrown right out of here," Danny said. His face screwed up in a horrible expression of discomfort.

"If the cops don't beat the other tenants to it."

"Please, genie," Danny said, leaning down almost to the lamp. "Just tone it down a little, willya?"

OFFSPRING OF A MILLION STINKS! SUFFER!

"You're no genie," Connie said smugly. Danny looked at her with disbelief.

"He's no genie? Then what the hell do you think he is?"

She swatted him. Then put her finger to her lips.

THAT IS WHAT I AM, WHORE OF DEGENERACY!

"No you're not."

I AM.

"Am not."

AM.

"Am not."

AM SO, CHARNEL HOUSE HARLOT! WHY SAY YOU NAY?

"A genie has a lot of power; a genie doesn't need to shout like that to make himself heard. You're no genie, or you'd speak softly. You can't speak at a decent level, because you're a fraud."

CAUTION, TROLLOP!

"Foo, you don't scare me. If you were as powerful as you make out, you'd tone it way down."

is this better? are you convinced?

"Yes," Connie said. "I think that's more convincing. Can you keep it up though? That's the question."

forever, if need be.

"And you can grant wishes?" Danny was back in the conversation.

naturally, but not to you, disgusting grub of humanity.

"Hey, listen," Danny replied angrily, "I don't give a damn what or who you are! You can't talk to me in that way." Then a thought dawned on him.

"After all, I'm your master!"

ah! correction, filth of primordial seas. there are some djinn who are mastered by their owners, but

unfortunately for you i am not one of them, for i am not free to leave this metal prison. i was imprisoned in this accursed vessel many ages ago by a besotted sorcerer who knew nothing of molecular compression and even less of the binding forces of the universe. he put me into this thrice-cursed lamp, far too small for me, and i have been wedged within ever since. over the ages my good nature has rotted away. i am powerful, but trapped. those who own me cannot request anything and hope to realize their boon. i am unhappy and an unhappy djinn is an evil djinn. were i free, i might be your slave; but as i am now, i will visit unhappiness on you in a thousand forms!

Danny chuckled. "The hell you will. I'll toss you in the incinerator."

ah! but you cannot. once you have bought the lamp, you cannot lose it, destroy it or give it away, only sell it. i am with you forever, for who would buy such a miserable lamp?

And thunder rolled in the sky.

"What are you going to do?" Connie asked. *do? just ask me for something, and you shall see!*

"Not me," Danny said, "you're too cranky." *wouldn't you like a billfold full of money?*

There was sincerity in the voice from the lamp.

"Well, sure, I want money, but—"

The djinn's laughter was gigantic, and suddenly cut off by the rain of frogs that fell from a point one inch below the ceiling, clobbering Danny and Connie with small, reeking, wriggling green bodies. Connie screamed and dove for the clothes closet. She came out a second later, her hair full of them; they were falling in the closet, as well. The rain of frogs continued and when Danny opened the front door to try and escape them, they fell in the hall. He slammed the door—he realized he was still naked—and covered his head with his hands. The frogs fell, writhing, stinking, and then they were knee-deep in them, with little filthy, warty bodies jumping at their faces.

what a lousy disposition i've got! the djinn laughed. And he laughed again, a clangorous peal that was silenced only when the frogs stopped, disappeared, and the flood of blood began.

It went on for a week. They could not get away from him no matter where they went. They were also slowly starving: they could not go out to buy groceries without the earth opening under their feet, or a herd of elephants chasing them down the street, or hundreds of people getting violently ill and vomiting on them. So they stayed in and ate what canned goods they had stored up in the first four days of their marriage. But who could eat with locusts filling the apartment from top to bottom, or snakes that were intent on gobbling them up like little white rats?

They could not go out to buy groceries without the earth opening under their feet, or a herd of elephants chasing them down the street, or hundreds of people getting violently ill and vomiting on them.

First came the frogs, then the flood of blood, then the whirling dust storm, then the spiders and gnats, then the snakes and then the locusts and then a tiger that had them backed against a wall and ate the chair they used to ward him off. Then came the bats and the leprosy and the hailstones and then the floor dissolved under them and they clung to the wall fixtures while their furniture—which had been quickly delivered (the moving men had brought it during the hailstones)—fell through, nearly killing the little old lady who lived beneath them.

Then the walls turned red hot and melted, and then the lightning burned everything black, and finally Danny had had enough. He cracked, and went gibbering around the room, tripping over the man-eating vines that were growing out of the light sockets and the floorboards. He finally sat down in a huge puddle of monkey urine and cried till his face grew puffy and his eyes flame-red and his nose swelled to three times normal size.

"I've got to get away from all this!" he screamed hysterically, drumming his heels, trying to eat his pants' cuffs.

you can divorce her, and that means you are voided out of the purchase contract: she wanted the lamp, not you, the djinn suggested.

Danny looked up (just in time to get a ripe Black Angus meadow muffin in his face) and yelled, "I won't! You can't make me. We've only been married a week and four days and I won't leave her!"

Connie, covered with running sores, stumbled to Danny and hugged him, though he had turned to tapioca pudding and was melting. But three days later, when ghost images of people he had feared all his life came to haunt him, he broke completely and allowed Connie to call the rest home on the boa constrictor that had once been the phone. "You can come and get me when this is over," he cried pitifully, kissing her poison ivy lips. "Maybe if we split up, he'll have some mercy." But they both doubted it.

When the downstairs buzzer rang, the men from the Home for the Mentally Absent came into the debacle that had been their apartment and saw Connie pulling her feet out of the swamp slime only

with difficulty; she was crying in unison with Danny as they bundled him into the white ambulance. Unearthly laughter rolled around the sky like thunder as her husband was driven away.

Connie was left alone. She went back upstairs; she had nowhere else to go.

She slumped down in the pool of molten slag, and tried to think while ants ate at her flesh and rabid rats gnawed off the wallpaper.

i'm just getting warmed up, the djinn said from the lamp.

Less than three days after he had been admitted to the Asylum for the Temporarily Twitchy, Connie came to get Danny. She came into his room; the shades were drawn, the sheets were very white; when he saw her his teeth began to chatter.

She smiled at him gently. "If I didn't know better, I'd swear you weren't simply overjoyed to see me, Squires."

He slid under the sheets till only his eyes were showing. His voice came through the covers. "If I break out in boils, it will definitely cause a relapse, and the day nurse hates mess."

"Where's my macho protective husband now?"

"I've been unwell."

"Yeah, well, that's all over. You're fit as a fiddle, so bestir your buns and let's get out of here."

Danny Squires's brow furrowed. This was not the tone of a woman with frogs in her hair. "I've been contemplating divorce or suicide."

She yanked the covers down, exposing his naked legs sticking out from the hem of the hospital gown. "Forget it, little chum. There are at least a hundred and ten positions we haven't tried yet before I consider dissolution. Now will you get out of that bed and come on?"

"But ..."

"... a thing I'll kick, if you don't move it."

Bewildered, he moved it.

Outside, the Rolls-Royce waited with its motor running. As they came through the front doors of the Institute for the Neurologically Flaccid, and Connie helped Danny from the discharge wheelchair, the liveried chauffeur leaped out and opened the door for them. They got in the back seat, and Connie said, "To the house, Mark." The chauffeur nodded, trotted briskly around and climbed behind the wheel. They took off to the muted roar of twin mufflers.

Danny's voice was a querulous squeak. "Can we afford a rented limo?"

Connie did not answer, merely smiled, and snuggled closer to him.

After a moment Danny asked, "What house?"

Connie pressed a button on the console in the

armrest and the glass partition between front and back seats slid silently closed. "Do me a favor, will you," she said, "just hold the twenty questions till we get home? It's been a tough three days and all I ask is that you hold it together for another hour."

Danny nodded reluctantly. Then he noticed she was dressed in expensive clothes. "I'd better not ask about your mink-trimmed jacket, either, right?"

"It would help."

He settled into silence, uneasy and juggling more than just twenty unasked questions. And he remained silent until he realized that they were not taking the expressway into New York. He sat up sharply, looked out the rear window, snapped his head right and left trying to ascertain their location, and Connie said, "We're not going to Manhattan. We're going to Darien, Connecticut."

"Darien? Who the hell do we know in Darien?"

"Well, Upjohn, for one, lives in Darien."

"Upjohn?! Ohmigod, he's fired me and sent the car to bring me to him so he can have me executed! I *knew* it!"

"Squires," she said, "Daniel, my love, Danny the heart of my heart, will you just kindly close the tap on it for a while! Upjohn has nothing to do with us anymore. Nothing at all."

"But . . . we live in New York!"

"Not anymore we don't."

Twenty minutes later they turned into the most expensive section in Darien and sped down a private road.

They drove an eighth of a mile down the private road lined with Etruscan pines, beautifully maintained, and pulled into a winding driveway. Five hundred yards farther, and the drive spiraled in to wind around the front of a huge, luxurious, completely tasteful Victorian mansion. "Go on," Connie said. "Look at your house."

"Who lives here?" Danny asked.

"I just told you: *we* do."

"I thought that's what you said. Let me out here, I'll walk back to the nuthouse."

The Rolls pulled up before the mansion, and a butler ran down to open the car door for them. They got out and the servant bowed low to Connie. Then he turned to Danny. "Good to have you home, Mr. Squires," he said. Danny was too unnerved to reply.

"Thank you, Penzler," Connie said. Then, to the chauffeur, "Take the car to the garage, Mark; we won't be needing it again this afternoon. But have the Porsche fueled and ready; we may drive out later to look at the grounds."

"Very good, Mrs. Squires," Mark said. Then he drove away.

Danny was somnambulistic. He allowed himself to be led into the house where he was further stunned

by the expensive fittings, the magnificent halls, the deep-pile rugs, the spectacular furniture, the communications complex set into an entire wall, the Art Deco bar that rose out of the floor at the touch of a button, the servants who bowed and smiled at him, as if he belonged there. He was boggled by the huge kitchen, fitted with every latest appliance; and the French chef who saluted with a huge ladle as Connie entered.

"Wh-where did this all *come* from?" He finally gasped out the question as Connie led him upstairs on the escalator.

"Come on, Danny, you know where it all came from."

"The limo, the house, the grounds, the mink-trimmed jacket, the servants, the Vermeer in the front hall, the cobalt-glass Art Deco bar, the entertainment center with the beam television set, the screening room, the bowling alley, the polo field, the Neptune swimming pool, the escalator and six-strand necklace of black pearls I now notice you are wearing around your throat . . . all of it came from the genie?"

"Sorta takes your breath away, don't it?" Connie said ingenuously.

"I'm having a little trouble with this."

"What you're having trouble with, champ, is that Mas'ud gave you a hard time, you couldn't handle it, you crapped out, and somehow I've managed to pull it all out of the swamp."

"I'm thinking of divorce again."

They were walking down a long hall lined with works of modern Japanese illustration by Yamazaki, Kobayashi, Takahiko Li, Kenzo Tanii and Orai. Connie stopped and put both her hands on Danny's trembling shoulders.

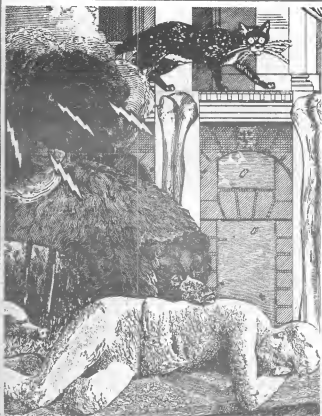
"What we've got here, Squires, is a bad case of identity reevaluation. Nobody gets through *all* the battles. We've been married less than two weeks, but we've known each other for three years. You don't know how many times I folded before that time, and I don't know how many times you triumphed before that time."

"What I've known of you for three years made it okay for me to marry you; to think 'This guy will be able to handle it the times I can't.' That's a lot of what marriage is, to my way of thinking. I don't have to score every time, and neither do you. As long as the unit maintains. This time it was my score. Next time it'll be yours. Maybe."

Danny smiled weakly. "I'm not thinking of divorce."

Movement out of the corner of his eye made him look over his shoulder.

An eleven-foot-tall black man, physically perfect in every way, with chiseled features like an ob- sidian Adonis, dressed in an impeccably tailored



three-piece Savile Row suit, silk tie knotted precisely, stood just in the hallway, having emerged from open fifteen-foot-high doors of a room at the juncture of the corridors.

"Uh . . ." Danny said.

Connie looked over her shoulder. "Hi, Mas'ud. Squires, I would like you to meet Mas'ud Jan bin Jan, a Mazikeen djinn of the ifrit, by the grace of Sulaymin, master of *all* the jinni, though Allah be the wiser. Our benefactor. My friend."

"How good a friend?" Danny whispered, seeing the totem of sexual perfection looming eleven feet high before him.

"We haven't known each other carnally, if that's what I perceive your squalid little remark to mean," she replied. And a bit wistfully she added, "I'm not his type. I think he's got it for Lena Horne." At Danny's semi-annoyed look she added, "For God's sake, stop being so bloody suspicious!"

Mas'ud stepped forward, two steps bringing him the fifteen feet intervening, and proffered his greeting in the traditional Islamic head-and-heart salute, flowing outward, a smile on his matinee idol face. "Welcome home, Master. I await your smallest request."

Danny looked from the djinn to Connie, amazement and copelessness rendering him almost speechless. "But . . . you were stuck in the lamp . . . bad-tempered, oh boy were you bad-tempered . . . how did you . . . how did she . . ."

Connie laughed, and with great dignity the djinn joined in.

"You were in the lamp . . . you gave us all this . . . but you said you'd give us nothing but aggravation! Why?"

In deep, mellifluous tones Danny had come to associate with a voice that could knock high-flying

fowl from the air, the djinn smiled warmly at them and replied, "Your good wife freed me. After ten thousand years cramped over in pain with an eternal bellyache, in that most miserable of dungeons, Mistress Connie set me loose. For the first time in a hundred times ten thousand years of cruel and vengeful master after master, I have been delivered into the hands of one who treats me with respect. We are friends. I look forward to extending that friendship to you, Master Squires." He seemed to be warming to his explanation, expansive and effusive. "Free now, permitted to exist among humans in a time where my kind are thought a legend, and thus able to live an interesting, new life, my gratitude knows no bounds, as my hatred and anger knew no bounds. Now I need no longer act as a Kako-daemon, now I can be the sort of ifrit Rabbi Jeremiah ben Eliazar spoke of in Psalm xli.

"I have seen much of this world in the last three days as humans judge time. I find it most pleasing in my view. The speed, the shine, the light. The incomparable Lena Horne. Do you like basketball?"

"But how? How did you *do* it, Connie? How? No one could get him out . . ."

She took him by the hand, leading him toward the fifteen-foot-high doors. "May we come into your apartment, Mas'ud?"

The djinn made a sweeping gesture of invitation, bowing so low his head was at Danny's waist as he and Connie walked past.

They stepped inside the djinn's suite and it was as if they had stepped back in time to ancient Basra and the Thousand Nights and a Night. Or into a Cornel Wilde costume epic.

But amid all the silks and hangings and pillows and tapers and coffers and brassware, there in the center of the foyer, in a lucite case atop an onyx pedestal, lit from an unknown source by a single glowing spot of light, was a single icon.

"Occasionally magic has to bow to technology," Connie said. Danny moved forward. He could not make out what the item lying on the black velvet pillow was. "And sometimes ancient anger has to bow to common sense."

Danny was close enough to see it now.

Simple. It had been so simple. But no one had thought of it before. Probably because the last time it had been needed, by the lamp's previous owner, it had not existed.

"A can opener," Danny said. "A can opener!! A simple, stupid, everyday can opener!! That's all it took? I had a nervous breakdown and you figured out a can opener?"

"Can do," Connie said, winking at Mas'ud.

"Not cute, Squires," Danny said. But he was thinking of the diamond as big as the Ritz. **W**

TV's Twilight Zone: Part Thirteen

CONTINUING MARC SCOTT ZICREE'S
SHOW-BY-SHOW GUIDE TO THE ENTIRE
TWILIGHT ZONE TELEVISION SERIES,
COMPLETE WITH ROD SERLING'S OPENING
AND CLOSING NARRATIONS

"You unlock this door with the key of imagination. Beyond it is another dimension—a dimension of sound, a dimension of sight, a dimension of mind. You're moving into a land of both shadow and substance, of things and ideas. You've just crossed over into the Twilight Zone."



107. MUTE

Written by Richard Matheson
Based on his short story
Producer: Herbert Hirschman
Director: Stuart Rosenberg
Dir. of Photography: Robert W. Pittack
Music: Fred Steiner
Cast

Ilse Nielsen: Ann Jillian
Harry Wheeler: Frank Overton
Cora Wheeler: Barbara Baxley
Miss Frank: Irene Dailey
Mrs. Nielsen: Claudia Bryer
Holger Nielsen: Robert Boon
Prof. Werner: Oscar Beregi
Mrs. Werner: Eva Soreny
Tom Poulter: Percy Helton

"What you're witnessing is the curtain-raiser to a most extraordinary play; to wit, the signing of a pact, the commencement of a project. The play itself will be performed almost entirely offstage. The final scenes are to be enacted a decade hence and with a different cast. The main character of these final scenes is Ilse, the daughter of Professor and Mrs. Nielsen, age two. At the moment she lies sleeping in her

crib, unaware of the singular drama in which she is to be involved. Ten years from this moment, Ilse Nielsen is to know the desolating terror of living simultaneously in the world—and in the Twilight Zone."

In Germany in 1953, a group of people pledge that, in order to develop their mental powers, they and their children will communicate solely through telepathy. The Nielsen family then moves to German Corners, Pennsylvania. Ten years later, their house burns down. Prof. Nielsen and his wife are killed; their last act—to telepathically warn their daughter Ilse, who escapes unharmed. Sheriff Harry Wheeler and his wife Cora take Ilse in, but they are appalled to find she cannot speak, read, or write—a result, they assume, of maltreatment by her reclusive parents. Ilse, a highly developed telepath, can read the thoughts of those around her, but their speech is a hopeless garble. She is marooned, with no way to communicate. Cora, whose own daughter drowned, is determined to keep Ilse. When Harry writes letters about Ilse to a German address found in Prof. Nielsen's mail, Cora surreptitiously destroys them. Wanting Ilse to learn to talk, Harry sends her to a class taught by Miss Frank, who tries to get Ilse to say her own name by having the class repeat it in unison. When this fails, she realizes that

Ilse can read her thoughts. Miss Frank's father had tried to make her into a medium when she was a child; she assumes this has happened to Ilse, too. Over a period of days, Miss Frank has her class think Ilse's name—which Ilse finds deafening. Meanwhile, Prof. Werner and his wife arrive in town from Germany, concerned that they have not heard from the Nielsens in months. At the Wheeler house, they discover that Miss Frank's methods have destroyed Ilse's ability forever; their thoughts are a painful jumble to her. Hysterically, she cries out, "My name is Ilse!" again and again. Cora tells the Werners that she loves Ilse and won't let them take her. Seeing that Ilse would be an outcast in a community of telepaths, the Werners let the Wheelers keep her. But Frau Werner tells her husband it is no tragedy; Ilse's real parents saw her only as an experiment. Now she will be loved.

"It has been noted in a book of proved wisdom that perfect love casteth out fear. While it's unlikely that this observation was meant to include that specific fear which follows the loss of extrasensory perception, the principle remains, as always, beautifully intact. Case in point, that of Ilse Nielsen, former resident of the Twilight Zone."

108. DEATH SHIP

Written by Richard Matheson
Based on his short story
Producer: Herbert Hirschman
Director: Don Medford
Dir. of Photography: Robert W. Pittack
Music: Stock

Cast

Capt. Paul Ross: Jack Klugman
Lt. Ted Mason: Ross Martin
Lt. Mike Carter: Fredrick Beir
Ruth: Mary Webster
Jeannie: Tammy Marihugh
Kramer: Ross Elliott
Mrs. Nolan: Sara Taft

"Picture of the spaceship E-89, cruising above the thirteenth planet of star system fifty-one, the year 1997. In a little while, supposedly, the ship will be landed and specimens taken: vegetable, mineral and, if any, animal. These will be brought back to overpopulated Earth, where technicians will evaluate them and, if everything is satisfactory, stamp their findings with the word 'inhabitable' and open up yet another planet for colonization. These are the things that are supposed to happen ... Picture of the crew of the spaceship E-89: Captain Ross, Lieutenant Mason, Lieutenant Carter. Three men who have just reached a place which is as far from home as they will ever be. Three men who in a matter of minutes will be plunged into the darkest nightmare reaches of the Twilight Zone."

When Lt. Mason's monitor shows something glinting on the surface of the planet, Capt. Ross brings the ship in for a landing. They are shocked by what greets them: a wrecked duplicate of their own ship, and inside it what appear to be their own dead bodies, identical down to the identification cards in their pockets! Mason and Carter are convinced that they are dead, but the strong-willed Capt. Ross rejects this utterly. Back on board their ship he offers his own theory: that somehow they have gone through a time warp and witnessed a possible future in which their ship crashed on takeoff and they were killed. If they don't go up, they won't die. Mason objects; Ross has no one waiting back on Earth for him.



There's an even more serious consideration, though; this is a harsh planet, and their food and power supplies will soon be depleted. Carter wearily rubs his eyes—and finds himself back on Earth, being greeted by Mr. Kramer and Mrs. Nolan, two of his neighbors. Eager to see his wife, he rushes home. He doesn't find her, but he does find a veiled black hat, black gloves and a black purse on the bed, plus a telegram informing her that he has died. Abruptly, Ross's voice brings him back to the ship. He tells the captain of his bizarre experience—and suddenly remembers that both Mr. Kramer and Mrs. Nolan are dead. Ross glances over to the bunk where Mason is napping, and is amazed to see that he's disappeared! As for Mason, he's awakened back on Earth, and is joyously reunited with his wife and daughter, both previously killed in an automobile accident. Suddenly, Ross appears on the scene. He grabs Mason, they struggle—and both of them are back on the ship. Ross has a new theory: the wrecked ship and the scenes back on Earth are illusions designed by telepathic aliens in order to stop them from reporting to Earth about this planet. In order to prove it, Ross takes the ship back up into space. There is no malfunction and no crash. Mason and Carter gladly concede that Ross must have been right after all. But then Ross orders them to prepare to land; they've got

orders to collect samples, and he's determined to prove that there is no wrecked ship. Certain that if they try to land they'll crash, Carter tries to wrest the controls away. The ship plunges out of control. Ross and Mason manage to land the ship safely. But when they open the window ports, they see the same wrecked ship outside. Carter is despairing; the next time they take off they will crash. But Mason, drained of all but hopelessness, corrects him: they won't crash ... because they already have crashed. They are dead. He pleads with Ross to let them go, but Ross refuses. "We're going to go over it again!" he says. Abruptly, all three find themselves back at the beginning, with Mason spotting a strange glint on his screen ...

"Picture of a man who will not see anything he does not choose to see—including his own death. A man of such indomitable will that even the two men beneath his command are not allowed to see the truth; which truth is, that they are no longer among the living, that the movements they make and the words they speak have all been made and spoken countless times before—and will be made and spoken countless times again, perhaps even unto eternity. Picture of a latter-day Flying Dutchman, sailing into the Twilight Zone."

109. JESS-BELLE

Written by Earl Hamner, Jr.
Producer: Herbert Hirschman
Director: Buzz Kulik
Dir. of Photography: Robert W. Pittack
Music: Van Cleave

Cast

Jess-Belle: Anne Francis
Billy-Ben Turner: James Best
Ellwyn Glover: Laura Devon
Granny Hart: Jeanette Nolan
Ossie Stone: Virginia Gregg
Luther Glover: George Mitchell
Mattie Glover: Helen Kleeb
Obed Miller: Jim Boles
Minister: Jon Lormer

"The Twilight Zone has existed in many lands, in many times. It has its roots in history, in something that happened long, long ago and got told about and handed down from one generation of folk to the other. In the telling, the story gets added to and embroidered on, so that what might have happened in the time of the druids is told as if it took place yesterday in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Such stories are best told by an elderly grandfather on a cold winter's night by the fireside—in the southern hills of the Twilight Zone."

In the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, Billy-Ben Turner proposes to Ellwyn Glover, the pretty daughter of a successful farmer. But Jess-Belle Stone, a poor-but-beautiful girl Billy-Ben passionately romanced on the sly before falling in love with Elly, is determined that the marriage will never take place. She seeks the aid of Granny Hart, who is rumored to be a witch. Granny has a love potion. Having no money, Jess offers to pay for it with her silver hairpin; but Granny is inexplicably repulsed by the object—there'll be another price, one that Jess will soon know. Jess drinks

down the potion. The magic works: the moment Billy sees her, he forgets utterly about Elly and belongs totally to Jess. Jess is joyful, but comes midnight she learns the terrible price she has paid for her beloved prize: she transforms into a leopard and prowls until dawn. Granny Hart is a witch, and now so is she. She has bartered away her soul and is doomed to become a cat every night. In anguish, Jess initially rejects Billy's pleas to marry him. But eventually, her love for Billy triumphs over her apprehension; she accepts his proposal. Before they can be wed, though, a hunting party is organized to track down what the community assumes to be a wildcat. The menfolk corner the leopard in the Glovers' shed and fire at it. It disappears in a cloud of smoke—and Jess's spell over Billy is broken. A year passes and Billy is now preparing to marry Elly. He assumes that Jess is dead, but he soon finds he's sadly mistaken. At the wedding, a spider appears on Elly's gown—one that vanishes in smoke and flame when Billy tries to crush it! When Billy and Elly return to his cabin, an unseen force grabs Elly's arm, then a rat pushes over a grandfather clock, narrowly missing them. Elly is terrified. Billy tells her to sit in a chair, read the Bible and not move. He rushes to Granny Hart's cabin and demands to know

the method for killing a witch. Granny asks for a lock of his hair so she can bewitch him, but he's too smart for her; he pays her in coin—and learns that Jess can be killed by stabbing one of her dresses through the heart with silver. From Jess's mother, he gets Jess's dress and silver hairpin. These in hand, he returns home and finds Elly waiting for him outside the door. But when she opens her mouth, her voice is Jess-Belle's—Elly is possessed! Hurriedly, Billy slips the dress on a form and stabs it. Jess materializes in the dress then disappears, vanquished for good. Billy is relieved to see that Elly is herself again. Strolling outside, they see a falling star—sure sign that a witch has just died.

"Jess-Belle" has no closing narration by Serling. Instead, it ends with a repeat of a folk song heard at the beginning:

*Fair was Elly Glover,
Dark was Jess-Belle.
Both they loved the same man,
And both they loved him well.*



110. MINIATURE

Written by Charles Beaumont
Producer: Herbert Hirschman
Director: Walter E. Grauman
Dir. of Photography: Robert W. Pittack
Music: Fred Steiner

Cast

Charley Parkes: Robert Duvall
Mrs. Parkes: Pert Kelton
Myrna: Barbara Barrie
Buddie: Len Weinrib
Dr. Wallman: William Windom
Museum Guard: John McLiam
The Doll: Claire Griswold
The Maid: Nina Roman
The Sutor: Richard Angarola
Diemel: Barney Phillips
Harriet: Joan Chambers
The Guide: Chet Stratton

"To the average person, a museum is a place of knowledge, a place of beauty and truth and wonder. Some people come to study, others to contemplate, others to look for the sheer joy of looking. Charley Parkes has his own reasons. He comes to the museum to get away from the world. It isn't really the sixty-cent cafeteria meal that has drawn him here every day, it's the fact that here in these strange, cool halls he can be alone for a little while, really and truly alone. Anyway, that's how it was before he got lost and wandered in—to the Twilight Zone."

Charley, a shy bachelor who lives with his mother, goes to the museum cafeteria, only to find it closed for alterations. Suddenly, he is caught up in a tour group and carried along to a different part of the museum. Extricating himself, he finds himself facing an elaborate nineteenth-century dollhouse—and is astounded to see the beautiful, lifelike doll of a woman within playing Mozart's piano sonata in A major on a miniature

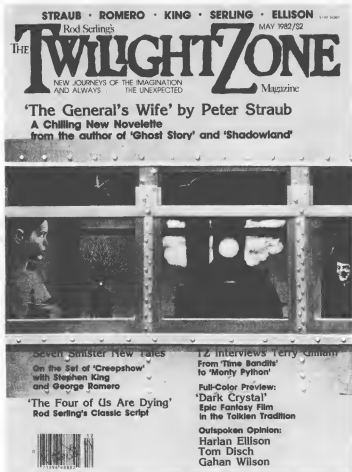


harpsichord. Curious, he asks a friendly museum guard about the mechanism, and is told that the doll is carved from a solid piece of wood and *doesn't* play any music! Returning late to work, Charley is fired, mainly for being "a square peg." In the days that follow, however, he doesn't search for another job; instead, he spends all his time at the museum, watching the doll—whom everyone else sees as totally inanimate—going through a routine of eating her meals, playing music, being groomed by her maid, reading, and greeting a miniature gentleman caller—all in pantomime. He has fallen in love with the doll, but he keeps this a secret. His mother, sister Myrna, and brother-in-law Buddie are dismayed by his solitary habits. Trying to help Charley break out of his cocoon, Myrna sets him up with Harriet, who works at her office, but the date ends in disaster when *she* makes a pass! Next day, Charley is back at the museum. Suddenly, the tiny gentleman caller barges drunkenly into the dollhouse, knocking the maid away and carrying the terrified doll out of sight. Desperate to protect her honor, Charley grabs up a stone cherub and smashes the glass case

surrounding the dollhouse—an act that lands him in an asylum. Eventually, Charley is able to convince Dr. Wallman, a psychiatrist, that he is cured of his delusion that the doll is alive. He is released back to his family, but the first chance he gets, he sneaks back to the museum. There, he finds the doll crying tears of loneliness. He tells her that he understands; he, too, has been alone all his life. Together, they could understand, help and love each other. Frantic to find him, Dr. Wallman, Charley's family, and the police search the museum, but there is no sign of him. Then the museum guard peers into the dollhouse, and is surprised to see *two* miniature figures. One is the doll ... and the other is Charley!

"They never found Charley Parkes, because the guard didn't tell them what he saw in the glass case. He knew what they'd say, and he knew they'd be right, too, because seeing is not always believing—especially if what you see happens to be an odd corner of the Twilight Zone." 17

In the May TZ...



In *Ghost Story* and *Shadowland*, he unlocked worlds of mystery and dread. Now **Peter Straub** presents his first work of shorter fiction in **THE GENERAL'S WIFE**, a chilling, novelette-length study of terror in a London town house, where a desperate young American learns that nothing is quite the way it seems. Supernatural horror by a modern master—in next month's *Twilight Zone* ... Multitalented **Terry Gilliam**, *Monty Python's* only Yank, has since gone on to *The Life of Brian*, *Jabberwocky*, and the groundbreaking fantasy *Time Bandits*. He makes a most articulate subject for May's TZ Interview ... Visit the set of **CREEP-SHOW**, where *Living Dead* director **George Romero** is turning five **Stephen King** stories into a celluloid horror comic—with King himself in one of the choicest roles ... In our TZ fiction lineup, featuring the unparalleled imaginations of **Connie Willis**, **Kit Reed**, **G. J. A. O'Toole**, and others, you'll meet a derelict whose touch can heal, and a wife-murderer whose alibi proves all too believable ... You'll learn what happened after *Sleeping Beauty* woke up, and

you'll find out why truckers get that funny look in their eyes ... You'll also come face to face with **THE OTHER ONE**, a horror as unavoidable as death ... Meet the Hobbit-like heroes of **Jim Henson's** enchanting new fantasy film, **DARK CRYSTAL**, in TZ's full-color preview ... See the art—and craft—of television writing in **Rod Serling's THE FOUR OF US ARE DYING**, a classic *Twilight Zone* episode presented in its original script form, along with the **George Clayton Johnson** story that inspired it ... **Harlan Ellison** offers some nard-headed advice to would-be writers, **Tom Disch** dissects four new fantasy books (some of which were already dead), and **Gahan Wilson** lets you share his popcorn as he views the latest films ... Plus some *exceedingly* dark poetry from **Dick Tierney** (don't say we didn't warn you), an up-to-date guide to weird music from **Jack Sullivan** (bring a copy to your record store), and part fourteen of **Marc Scott Zicree's SHOW-BY-SHOW GUIDE TO TV'S 'TWILIGHT ZONE'** ... Our biggest value yet, and it's all yours for just two dollars.